Victoria Press

2004

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Victoria Press

Tenth Issue

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, North Carolina

2004

Editorial Board

David Holcombe, Division of Arts and Sciences

Gigi Derballa, Division of Arts and Sciences
Nancy Dillingham, Division of Continuing Education
Alma Fisher, Division of Continuing Education
Celia H. Miles, Division of Arts and Sciences
Tom Rash, Division of Continuing Education
Lee Sokol, Division of Business and Hospitality Education
Chris Tibbetts, Division of Arts and Sciences

This issue of *Victoria Press* is made possible through the support of
K. Ray Bailey, President,
Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College.

Table of Contents

Drawing by Annie Cicale iv
Summer: 1960 by Ron Rash 1
Drawing by Annie Cicale 1
Triptych by Ron Rash 2
Photograph by Derick Tickle 3
Dumb Supper by Ron Rash 4
Watercolor by Annie Cicale 5
First Light: Poems by Nancy Dillingham, Review by Celia Miles 6
Watercolor by Annie Cicale 8
Conviction by Nancy Dillingham 9
In the Garden by Nancy Dillingham 10
Marriage by Nancy Dillingham 11
Shivaree by Nancy Dillingham 11
Resolution by Nancy Dillingham 12
Borrowing Fire by Nancy Dillingham 12
Idaho by Nancy Dillingham 13
Sick/Spell by Nancy Dillingham 14
The Silver Jag by Celia Miles 15
Owl by Celia Miles 16
Haworth in the Spring by Celia Miles 17
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 17
Two-color wood engraving by Lauren Faulkenberry 18
Folie a Deux by Lauren Faulkenberry 19
From the Belly of the Furnace by Kathy Godfrey 30
Downtown Sociology 101(A True Story) by Lee Sokol 31
Photograph by Joe Franklin 31
Lies by Carolyn Pidgeon 32
Drawing by Annie Cicale 32
My Father by Kenet Adamson 33
Drawing by Annie Cicale 33

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 34
Westwindow by Will Hooper 36
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 36
Vision by Will Hooper 37
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 37
Get Lost: A Five Minute Screenplay by David Holcombe 38
Etching by Shirley McLaughlin 44
Winter Snakes by Randee Goodstadt 45
Mèxico, Mi Amor by Richard J. DeLuca 46
Follow Your Heart by Donna Helen Crisp 48
Untitled by Joe Allawos 49
Drawing by Shirley Lyon Garcia 49
A Possum Named Saddam, Dec. 13, 2003 by Chris Tibbetts 50
Two-color wood etching by Lauren Faulkenberry 53
Asheville, Rose Byrne, and the "Golden Age" by Joe Franklin 54
The Kiss by Julia Nunnally Duncan 60
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 63
Seattle to North Carolina by way of memory by Amy Goodman-Bide .64
Wives' Tales by Gabrielle Thompson 66
Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin 69
Notes on Contributors 70
Drawing by Annie Cicale 72

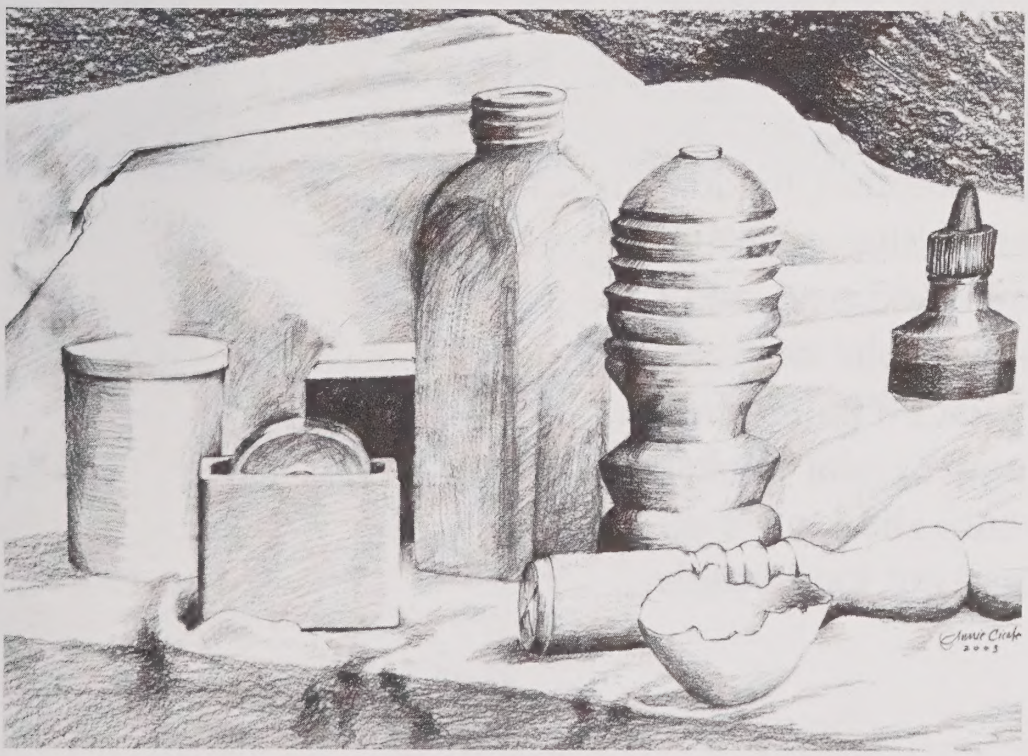
2004
All rights reserved.
Cover watercolor by Annie Cicale

Drawing by Annie Cicale

Summer: 1960

Ron Rash

Supper over, grown-ups porched
with cigarettes and stories,
we slipped through barbed wire onto
government land, a field where
the parkway flowed out of woods
toward a gorge called Goshen.
It was only when they passed
we saw the tags, Florida
orange and white, Kentucky blue,
New Hampshire green as the grass
our bodies pressed as we dreamed
of all we had never seen,
each square of tin a post card
of possibility, but what
flowed away was behind us,
farmhouse boards weathering gray,
nails scabbing with rust, faces
dimming as fireflies flickered
like faltering lanterns.



Drawing by Annie Cicale

Triptych

Ron Rash

December, 1928

Sleet ticks the tin roof like time,
wick-light rafter-hung, the cold
whitening my grandfather's breath,
though he is not cold, work-warmed
as the wood plane rasps, sets free
bright smell of cedar to fill
this shed, while in the farmhouse
my grandmother is sleeping,
a schoolmarm now farm wife whose
gift this is, a bookshelf that
will take a lifetime to fill.

July, 1968

No paper, television,
what news elsewhere stayed elsewhere,
even time set in the past.
When dark came unbleached muslin
shawled her knees as she raveled
the hod's thread-balls with beeswax,
then knit and knotted, made bedspeads
whose Rose of Sharon design
the sightless could read, and I
sitting nearby as she worked,
in my lap what I'd pulled from
the front room's cedar bookshelf,
No sound until she looked up
and said, read out loud awhile.

December, 2001

My aunt's home now, the bookshelf
moved years back to the back room
where I sit in bed this night,
book in hand as I listen
to the tick of sleet against
the window while cold seeps through
hardwood planks into this room
where I will soon place the book
back on the bookshelf, and sleep
beneath the Rose of Sharon.

Photograph by Derick Tickle

Dumb Supper

Ron Rash

She knew the old way to know,
pone of cornbread soaked with salt,
eaten in silence so dreams
might bring the man she'd marry
to her bedside, cupped palms filled
with water to slake her thirst.

Who came was her fear–James Boone,
white-haired and toothless, one wife
already worked to her grave,
who courted with talk of corn
and beans not canned, socks not darned,
hoe handles needing young hands.

Good enough match, her mother
claimed next day, but what she'd sipped
from Boone's hands was not water,
just more salt. Torchlight found her
in the French Broad come nightfall,
eyes closed but mouth wide open.

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

First Light: Poems by Nancy Dillingham

Review by Celia Miles

Some books of poetry are for keeping, just as some are for putting on the shelf and eying occasionally when one wants the simplicity of childhood nostalgia for another era or the challenge of wending one's intellectual way through the linguistic maze of another's mind. But some poems are for keeping, for returning to, for sticking close by. Such are the poems in Nancy Dillingham's third book, *First Light*.

Some images are "soft as smoke rising," ("First Light"), some slice through your senses so sharply you hurt ("On the edge/of madness/save for fractious fowl/garrulous guineas/in the field/creating a din..."). Some poems are so expressive they leave you knowing you'll never experience a particular scene or object the same way after reading Nancy's take on it: "Wheat Field," for example: "Liquescent/as fire/the grass/like glass/undulates/with light." This image stays in the same way Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper, yon solitary Highland lass" remains with the reader long after her song and his words are gone.

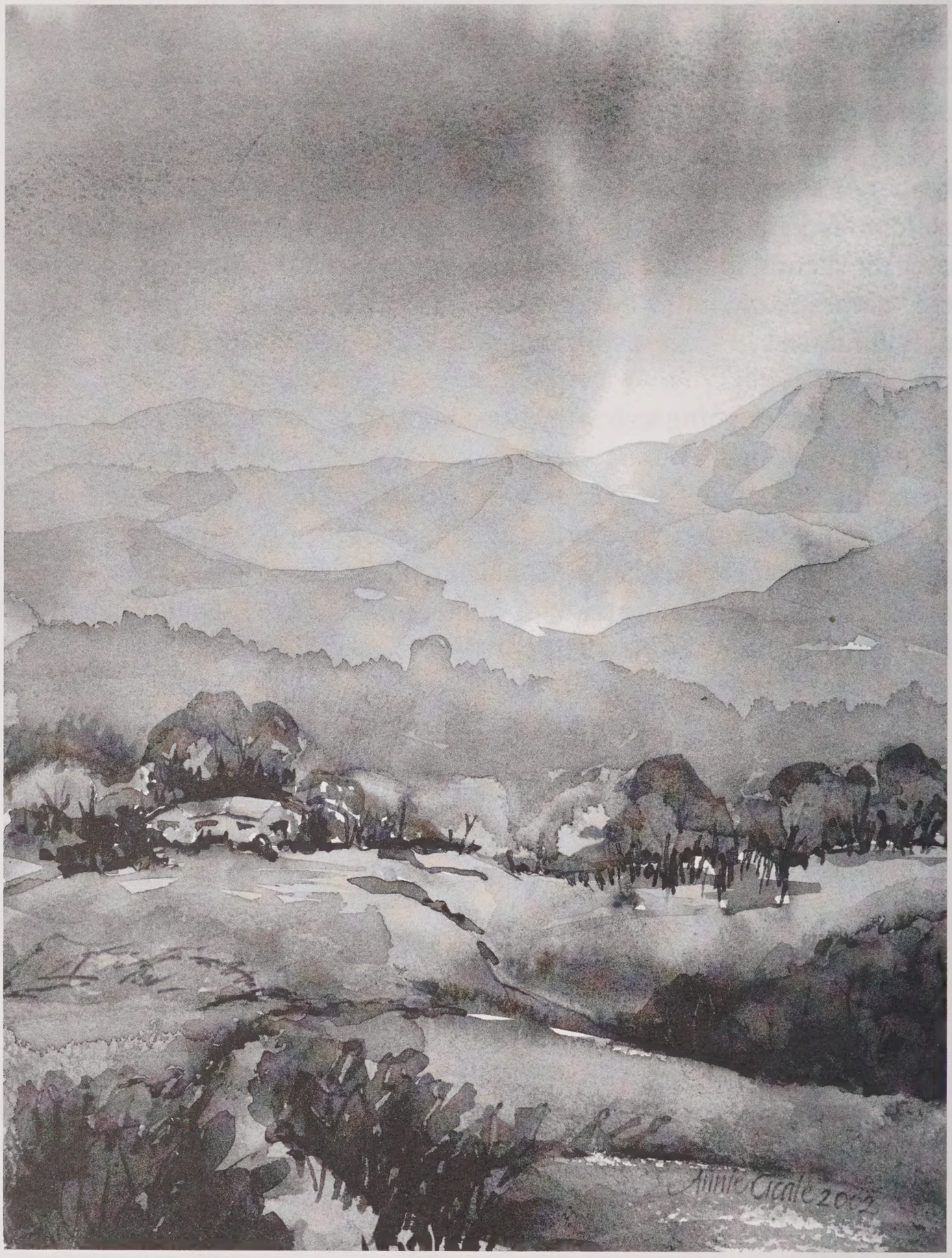
Ranging from six lines (10 words) to three pages–imagistic, narrative, dense as a laurel thicket, clean as the hogkiller's knife, precise as a lightning flash–these poems catch at your spirit; they linger like a memory. Simple? Hardly.

I've been rereading some of Stanley Kunitz's poems, returning to them after long years of being overwhelmed by their syntax in college; I treat them like intellectual exercises, studying the structure, the diction, the punctuation, finding in some of them, over-grammared and over-flighty as they are, a pleasure in discovery. After long careful reading, an occasional wow...that's what he's saying! Perfectly legitimate, but reading that way is thin pleasure beside reading *First Light*'s perfectly honed phrases, perfectly aligned words. Dillingham's poems tap our emotional keyboard with deft and delicate yet meaty and strong vocabulary. She's not "playing with the reader's mind" so much as illuminating the spirit. Rather than being irritated by what the poet conceals, the reader is drawn in by the spare silences between words. As a master carver removes to reveal essence, this poet pares away verbiage and peels back syllables. The result is stellar–poems blindingly immediate as sticking tongue to frozen metal.

Dillingham writes of the pioneer woman ("Pioneer woman/in all my silences/ I think of you"), the mountain woman ("There is a landscape/of the heart/that sets us apart"), and gives her the universal womanhood grounded in the specific ("Still/as a white sapling/she stands/ daguerreotyped/by the night"). The listing of herbs, the description of a diamondback rattlesnake, the "fence of flowers"–it's all poetry.

This collection moves us through the seasons, the hurts, the beauty of a hard life with touches of humor (surely most mountain children remember the woeful "Big Toe Tale"); but there's no glossing over the painful miscarriage, the snakebitten child, the mood of the wife, the "umber statue in the dusk," who waits in the doorway when the unfaithful husband returns from his week with her sister in Idaho.

If you're going to buy just one book of poetry this year, buy *First Light*. If you're going to buy three books of poetry, buy Dillingham's *New Ground* (1998), her *The Ambiguity of Morning* (2001), and *First Light*. And don't expect these books to gather dust or merely add to your shelved collection; they are to be read again and again. To paraphrase Flannery O'Connor's story title: A good poem is hard to find. You can find plenty of them in *First Light*.



Watercolor by Annie Cicale

Excerpts from *First Light*

Nancy Dillingham

Conviction

Through the yard
the bloodhounds ran
tracking a loose convict . . .

It happened in the hen house . . .
When she lifted the latch
the convict rose before her
like Lazarus

One breast in his hand
he tore at her clothes
then disappeared
like an apparition
into the woods

She rose on watery legs
gathered her eggs
into her worn felt hat
without breaking one . . .

She heard it coming
from a long way off
a persistent buzzing
in her head like the droning of bees

It was her own voice
spiraling within her
dark and coiled
writhing like a snake
ready to strike

her scream
raping the morning's silence

In the Garden

fall, from the Old English *feallan*, to fall down

Under molten skies
she spies
Henry
black-as-indigo
field hand

spread out
like a week's washing
against the fence stobs
head back
arms akimbo

She opens
her mouth
ready to go
into her familiar
rigamarole

Henry, you been out all night–
got tight–didn't make it home?

when
she sees
he's still
as some old
scarecrow

while a bird
pecks at
one of his eyes
as if his face were
a discarded corncob

Marriage

Fifteen
and not many chances
for courting . . .

When they say
her husband plucked her
like a flower
from his first wife's grave
(new mother for
his four small children)
it is so . . .

A quick stab of pain
a drop of blood
escharotic
she made her peace
with passion . . .

It is hardscrabble life
she romances now

Shivaree

Having jumped the broom
in her Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes
and only pair of shoes
she steps close to the affray
over the threshold
out of the frying pan
into the fire

Resolution

Her resolve
is like looking
for lizards
in the creek

turning over
the rocks
waiting for the disturbance
to clear

Borrowing Fire

From her mother's hearth
she lifts live coals
coaxes them
into the iron pot
carries them carefully
as eggs in a basket

their red eyes glowing
on the cold road home

Idaho

"You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles . . . repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal
of your body love what it loves."
Mary Oliver

Uncle Jeff
dropping everything
ran off to Idaho
with Aunt Ida
stayed all
of one week
before he came crawling
back home
like a sheep-killing dog
with his tail tucked
between his legs
Aunt Pallie standing
in the front door
waiting for him
a soft umber statue
in the dusk
holding a coffee cup
in her hands

come back, baby
come on home
supper's ready
bread's done
your coffee's hot

Nancy Dillingham

Sick/Spell

Steeped in memory
and half-sleep
the scent of mint
drifting
elusive as the smell
of spring water
wafting through a tangle
of touch-me-nots
and roots
I dream
her remedies:

poultice of onions
for pneumonia
boneset
for flu
butterfly root
for pleurisy
sassafras tea
to sweat the fever
tinct of kerosene
on a teaspoon of sugar
to cut the metallic strangulation
of croup
asafetida bags
to ward off colds
sumac and elderberries
for the throat
witch hazel
for dressing . . .

Easy as light she comes
her cool hand caressing

The Silver Jag

Celia Miles

Sometimes I see it still–that orange globe, that golden glow atop the dark mountain, that moon that became metaphor. I was barely twenty, remarkably innocent, romantic to the core. And in love. We were driving home from college–my "older man" boyfriend and I. He had arrived in his silver Jaguar at the Kentucky campus to pick me up. I'd shown him off to a couple of most-close friends and kept him away from the inspection of dorm mother Mrs. Borland. She'd never have let me start out with a man only a year or so younger than my dad, start on a seven-hour unchaperoned journey with a clearly sophisticated engineer, in a white shirt and tie. Even if my parents had written a note, which, of course, they hadn't, thinking I was with hometown Ricky Briggs.

I was in heaven–the leather seats, the masculine smell of cigarettes and cologne, the radio tuned to soft romantic sounds. We swung through the mountains of east Tennessee and were, I think, ascending Cumberland Mountain. I had abandoned my glasses, needed, I assured myself, only for reading, not for swooning beside my man. I begged and received permission to drive on the empty highway and the sense of gliding smoothness on the road was one never communicated in our old black Ford. The darkness enveloped us and so the silence. I glanced up and sighed a long sigh. "Look at that beautiful moon," I said in my newly acquired husky-with-love voice.

Jim looked up and then looked over at me. "Pull this car over to the side of the road," he said. "That's not the moon. It's a God damn Gulf station sign."

That moment was a defining one for me, revealing the chasm between magic and reality, between what I was sure I saw and what was, in fact, there, between the glow of youthful naivete and the armor of adult awareness. Love wasn't lost that night and I drove the silver Jag a few more times, but the moon has never been quite the same for me.

Owl

Celia Miles

Solitary, perched in twilight,
watching, in the guise of
meditating, the world go by,
I am wise, or indifferent
in my daytime Penseroso pose.
Mostly I watch, unruffled,
indifferent even to what happens at my feet.

I sit, absorb, catch
only what I need
with a swift downward swoop,
but high flight is not for me
nor brash power playing.

Content,
on my territorial limb
in my middle world, I
neither crab-scuttle on the forest floor
nor eagle-soar in the sunbeams or
the fleeting cloud.

Like the Indian guru and the Grecian sage,
I was never young.
My realm is wisdom
gained by passive observing, open pores.
Yet my voice provides no answer
only a plaintive who-who-who.

Haworth in the Spring

Celia Miles

Maria Bronte b. 1814 d. 1825

Elizabeth Bronte b. 1815 d. 1825

June 1998 after a visit to the Parsonage Museum

How scrawny here the daffodils
in meager window boxes
arranged by women
seeking yellow splashes in the gray
From the moor the smell of wet sheep
from the Black Bull stale beer, strong ale
and on the steep High Street
domestic frothy scents of soap
on washed door stoops and
from within fried bread, rashers, black tea
In gritty sunlight turning I think I see
coming up the cobbled street
Charlotte, Emily, Anne in mourning black
hesitating, waiting for reluctant Branwell.
He kicks a cringing sooty cat, then follows.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Two-color wood engraving by Lauren Faulkenberry

"Folie a Deux"

Lauren Faulkenberry

You know those movies where the maniacal character suffocates some unsuspecting, kittenish antihero with a pillow? I wondered if you could do that to yourself, without the aid of a diabolical sidekick. I yanked the fluffy mass of goose-down from behind me and shoved it over my face, wincing as the ends of the feathers pricked my cheeks. Is it possible to suffocate yourself, or would the muscles in your arms relax just in time to release the pressure and allow another breath? I pushed harder, but that only pinched the bridge of my nose and made me inhale an entire colony of dust mites. Things that work in the movies never work in real life. I should know that by now.

The door opened and I tossed the pillow aside, rolling off of the bed in a coughing, sneezing melodrama.

Myra, my roommate, has never learned the delicate art of knocking. Not even after walking in on scenes inspired by late-night cable television that would have made the devil blush.

"Joe, what are you doing?" she said.

"Nothing," I said, striding past her into the kitchen. "Nothing at all."

She followed me, babbling about meningitis, ulcers, diverticulitis, and other potential candidates for her demise. It's always like this, because Myra thinks she's going to die–every day. While other girls her age were going to fraternity parties and football games and fooling around with their boyfriends, she was busy falling in love with disease. Even now, when those same girls are getting married and divorced, she's reading medical books in a dark corner of our apartment, dog-earing her favorite pages. She still gets a new book every other day and reads it from cover to cover, hunting for symptoms that match hers. The librarian had to cut her off last week because the medical students had finals coming up, and all of the books about rare diseases had come to settle on our coffee table.

Myra's a walking encyclopedia of infections, parasites, genetic disorders and chronic afflictions. She has all of the symptoms memorized, knows every warning sign by heart, and sees potential sickness in every activity, from scrambling eggs to crossing the street.

She won't walk around anywhere barefoot, even inside our apartment. "Who knows what the last tenants did in here," she says. She still wears flip flops in the shower, terrified that she'll pick up athlete's foot, even though I'm the only other person who showers here. I've told her a hundred times that she's safe with me, since I don't have an athletic bone in my body, but she's not buying. Her naked feet have never felt the tickle of summer grass beneath them, and she scoffs whenever I lapse into an innocent childhood pleasure and wriggle my toes on the lawn. "You'll get hookworms," she says. "They'll devour your intestines."

I don't know what made her this way–her childhood photos indicate a healthy youth, and I've seen both of her parents invoke the five-second rule at Christmas when an errant chocolate cookie rolled across the kitchen tile. Whatever her ailment is, it's been with her ever since I've known her. She a shrink's cash cow and roommate's nightmare, but at least she pays the rent on time.

"I feel terrible," she said. "Look. Tiredness, fatigue, and nausea. My back hurts, my feet hurt, and my stomach hurts. It could be mono."

"How could you possibly have mono? No one you know has it."

She stuck a thermometer under her tongue. "You don't need friends to get mono, you can get it from anyone."

"You don't get close enough to anyone to get mono," I said, rummaging through the silverware drawer.

She sighed, poking her stomach, checking her pulse.

"Kissed any sick boys? Had any wild romps that were peppered with coughs?" I didn't have to look up to be struck by her icy glare.

"I'm glad you're taking this so seriously," she said. "Could you just drive me to the hospital please?"

I dug through the drawer, shoved potato smashers, steak knives, and salad tongs aside, pausing to study an ice pick. "I'm a little busy right now. It's probably just something you ate. Or one of those weird teas you drink."

"It's not the Lapsang Souchong," she said frowning. "But it could be my appendix."

I pulled a kiwi from the refrigerator. It looked fuzzier than usual, and several weeks old, but for my purposes it was fine. She rambled on about her appendix, clutching her side and poking her belly, while I hacked the kiwi into slimy chunks.

"What's that for?" she said.

"Never mind. You have enough to worry about with that rupturing appendix." I skewered the sticky fruit with the last of our fondue forks and held it a few inches from my tongue.

"What are you doing?" she said. "You'll break out in hives."

She was right, of course. I'm deathly allergic to kiwi fruit. I waved the stick at her, the green juice dripping onto the tile. "Just leave me alone," I said.

"What is wrong with you?" She took a step toward me.

"Hey!" I backed into the corner, holding the kiwi to my lips. "Back away, or the kiwi gets it."

She sighed. "Can't you think of a less painful way to go? Some way that won't make your face swell up like a basketball?"

I could think of lots of different ways. In fact, I've tried lots of different ways. I tried to hold my breath and suffocate once, but I just blacked out and cracked my head open on the bathroom floor. That cost me three hundred dollars and fourteen stitches, and I didn't even meet any cute nurses in the process. Then I went to one of those churches where they do the hokey-pokey with rattlesnakes, shaking them all about. It was way out in the woods, far out from town where nobody knew me, and miles from any hospital. It might have worked if the snakes hadn't been de-fanged and drugged. They were a pitiful excuse for heinous venomous serpents. They wouldn't even nibble.

"You know that's going to hurt like hell," Myra said. "Your tongue swells, your throat closes up, your heart pounds right out of your chest, and your head feels like it's going to blow like Vesuvius, along with the fact that you can't breathe."

I stared at her, peeling the furry skin from the kiwi.

"There are easier ways to go," she said. "Ways that won't require a closed casket."

I never have liked doing things the predictable way, but I don't really want to make a scene, either. It's sort of rude to go and leave a big mess for someone else to clean up. Especially when it's something as big as a body. As I considered this, she stomped on my foot and snatched the fork from my hand. These tangents of unselfish thoughts will ultimately be my undoing.

"Ouch!" I said. "Give it."

She rolled her eyes and smashed the kiwi into the garbage disposal. "You're such a dork."

"Fine," I said. "I didn't want an audience anyway."

That night I dreamt of a hundred ways to make my exit–diving from a cliff into a shallow lagoon filled with hungry piranha, being flattened by a Mardi Gras float full of clowns that mocked me in French or devoured by a pack of feral dogs with matted fur and crooked teeth. They say that your dreams reflect unfinished business. I have these dreams almost every night. But not always with the clowns.

The next morning, hoping that a change in my daily routine might eliminate feral dog-related nightmares, or at the very least entertain me, I went to the pet store and bought a spotted rabbit named Burt. I coughed and wheezed all the way home.

When Myra came in, she found me curled up in the recliner with Burt, ruffling his fur and stroking his ears, sending clouds of rabbit dander swirling around the room. I stared at her through watery eyes, coughing and sneezing, covered in hives. I could hardly breathe, but Burt seemed happy enough, enjoying the best massage of his life.

Myra flopped down on the couch, seemingly oblivious. Typical, since she rarely recognizes problems in others, unless they're contagious. "I think I may have nasal polyps," she said, flipping through her encyclopedia of rare diseases. "Joe, did you hear me? I have swelling and sniffling, and these small protuberances on my nose are a clear indication that something is amiss."

I scratched Burt's back and took a deep breath. I covered his velvety ears, so as not to shatter them with my thunderous string of sneezes.

"You can't do this now," she said, poking her nose and staring into a compact mirror. "I need a ride to the hospital."

"Do these small protuberances of yours inhibit your driving ability?"

"I could have a seizure or something–respiratory failure. My heart could stop. I'd wreck the car and then need a blood transfusion and probably pick up hepatitis."

"I think you just need a new facial cleanser," I said between coughs. "Those look like pimples from here."

She hurled a pillow at me, startling Burt. "You are a pathetic, self-indulgent, pitiful excuse for a masochist. Can't you think of a quick way?"

"Chet Baker jumped out of a window in Amsterdam," I said. "That was pretty quick."

"Fascinating," she said. "Why don't you try that?"

"Too messy. And too much of a scene. Do you really want to be left with a Joe-sized splatter underneath your living room window?"

"It doesn't have to be my window."

"And you'd be on the ten o'clock news, the grieving friend, with some stupid reporter asking, 'Now that your friend has leapt from your window, how does that make you feel?' And you'd have to go down to the police station, where they'd make you sit in the same chairs that hookers and drug dealers sit in, where you're sure to catch something debilitating or venereal at the very least."

She stared at me through narrowed eyes, scratching her nose. Burt's ears twitched, flopping in opposite directions.

"Then surely you can think of a cleaner way that's equally quick," she said.

Trains are quick. About a month ago I had the idea to walk down the railroad tracks behind our building. It would happen in a flash–I'd never know what hit me, except that I would because I'd planned the whole thing. As I was hopping from one tie to another, it occurred to me that when my mangled body was recovered, people would think that I'd been drunk, or stoned, or just plain stupid. Or maybe all three. I could hear the chatter–"I thought that guy was smart. He went to Cornell, you know. Top of his class." I couldn't have everyone thinking I was a complete idiot. I needed a more calculated, intellectual exit–one that would be poetic and charmingly appropriate–one that would make all of my former friends and lovers, consumed by guilt and loathing, sob quietly for days on end, asking why, why. My decision to opt for a way that left me standing in a more favorable light was interrupted by an ear-splitting whistle. I tripped on a tie, hit the rail with a thud, and saw that my sneaker was stuck. In a disgusted panic, thinking how terribly unjust it was that my final demise would immortalize me as a careless fool, I yanked my foot out of my favorite sneaker, seconds before it was crushed into bits by the South Line's 3:25 soybean shipment. That little blunder

set me back another two hundred and eighteen dollars and left me with a chipped front tooth and a mangled velveteen sneaker. The surviving shoe now sits on my mantle, quietly mocking my cowardice and reminding me of the indignity of it all. I have since been unable to drink soy milk.

"I hope that rabbit's had its shots," Myra said, frowning. She twirled a lock of honey-colored hair, searching for split ends. "They're prone to rabies and all sorts of nasty bacteria that turn your brain to soup and leave you squirming in a straightjacket in a padded room."

I sneezed, scratching the rash that had spread over my arms.

"And it would be just my luck that the stupid thing would bite me and not you," she said. "How can you just sit there and let your lungs fill with fur and dander and rabbit cooties? Why do you insist on torturing yourself?"

"Myra, if I wanted to be nagged to death, I'd go to my mother's." I stood, placing Burt back in the recliner. "Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to take a bath."

I sank into the water, further and further until I was lying on the bottom, staring at the light overhead, rippling through the sting of chlorine. (The water in our building is terrible. Myra won't even brush her teeth with it, citing all sorts of health violations–magnesium, chromium, protozoa. People pay good money for blue-green algae, but we get ours for free.) I closed my eyes and listened as the bubbles from my last breath broke the surface. I'd often thought that drowning would be a quiet, peaceful way to go, but then I saw a documentary about mobsters and the hapless victims they tossed into various inlets and bays with concrete blocks chained to their limbs. I learned that it takes twelve minutes to drown–twelve minutes for your lungs to fill with water and your heart to run out of oxygen, for your pulse to slow, for your heart to stop, all the while creating a burning sensation that feels like someone is slowly carving your chest into tiny pieces. After seeing the vivid re-enactment on the nature channel, it didn't seem so peaceful.

When my chest began to sting, I lifted my head and leaned back in the tub, eyeing the radio on the counter. It probably didn't have enough juice to fry an egg, much less a disgruntled twenty-six year-old, but I consider myself an optimist. I sat up and flipped it on. As Billie Holiday sang about her low-down man, I pulled it towards the water, and stopped at the lip of the old tub.

The cord was just an inch too short. Even my bathroom taunts me.

I leaned back and stared at my feet, the freakish second toes that were longer than my big toes. I heard once that this anomaly means you can have anyone you want, but my life so far offers no support of that theory. I wish I could say I had a good reason for wanting to take a bath with a radio, like I'd accidentally shot someone, or lost a few million dollars that weren't mine, or been sentenced for a life of crime. But it was none of those things. It was just because of a girl. A girl who said she didn't need me anymore.

These things are always because of a girl, aren't they?

Myra doesn't know much about death. She is just afraid of it. I, on the other hand, have cheated death countless times. Or maybe it's cheated me. I worked for the phone company once, when I was twenty, climbing up the poles and checking the transformers. That is until I got knocked off of one by 12,000 volts. I just let my screwdriver slide a little too far to the left, and the next thing I knew I was lying flat on my back fifteen feet below. They said the only thing that saved me was my baseball cap. If I'd been wearing a hardhat, like I was supposed to, I would have been toast. (At that time, it hadn't occurred to anyone that the metal fittings in the hardhats probably weren't such a good idea.)

They called it amazing, unbelievable, a miraculous recovery. I couldn't figure out why it happened at all. I wasn't an important member of society, a pillar of the community, or even an upstanding citizen, really. I just fixed transformers.

With my hair still dripping from the bath, I trudged through the living room and grabbed my coat. "I'm going down to the bar. You want to come?"

She looked up from her magazine. "Not if you're going to pick a fight. I don't want to see you get shot, and I'm not in the mood for a bloodborne disease."

"I'm not going for a bullet, I'm going for a drink. And just for the record, I don't intend to be shot, ever. If you're shot in a bar, then people automatically assume you were up to no good and you go down in history as a ruffian, a hooligan, and people think you had it coming. Then they tell your story at cocktail parties and shake their heads, saying in unison, 'What a waste.'"

She sighed and turned back to the magazine.

"Take Sam Cooke for example. A master of soul, fine citizen, legend of his time. Took a bullet from a jealous husband, and his name was mud."

"I thought the woman shot him," she said.

"Either way, it sort of ruins 'Cupid' for you, doesn't it?"

"Go out like that and you'll get pneumonia," she said.

"Would you at least keep me company while my lungs fill with fluid? It's depressing to go to a bar alone, and you can't actually die of loneliness."

She tossed the magazine aside and got her own coat from the closet. Generally, convincing Myra to go out to a public place is like pulling teeth. She refuses to eat in restaurants, complaining of various biological hazards. She's terrified of food that's been prepared out of her line of sight, and sanitation grades mean nothing to her–that's just a bell curve of relative contamination. She's already crossed the majority of staples off her list, anyway. Fruits are laden with pesticides, grains are infected by a cornucopia of bacteria, and meats are a breeding ground for disaster. She most recently gave up beef because of the outbreak of mad cow disease–you can't be sure that British cows didn't defect over here, she says. It's not like they need little bovine passports. For now, she'll eat only what she cooks, and she boils mercilessly to make sure she kills everything, including the taste. Ours is the most sterile kitchen east of the Mississippi.

We sat in the darkest corner of the bar, where the neon lights buzzed and flickered overhead. I ordered my usual pair of tequila shots. She had her usual–nothing.

"Those things'll kill you," she said.

I smiled. "Not nearly fast enough. Aren't you going to do a shot with me?"

But of course, she wasn't. I'd seen her drink only once, and that was by accident. She thought Long Island iced tea was a blend, like Oolong or Irish Breakfast. Somebody at a party convinced her to try one, and by the time she discovered the distinct lack of tea, she didn't care. The next morning she rolled out of bed thinking she was having an aneurysm. I probably should have warned her, but there are certain moments when your life becomes like a train wreck, and you feel compelled to watch the inevitable occur. When I later revealed the true

contents of the tea, she was convinced she had the beginning stages of cirrhosis of the liver, or alcohol poisoning at the very least. She still blames me for the whole incident, and to this day, won't drink anything but bottled water. She says milk is full of bacteria, juices are packed with pesticides, beer is just bottled candida, and coffee makes you sterile. And she won't drink anything at a bar, period. There's the constant threat of hepatitis–she cringes every time I poke a lime into a Corona. The last time I had whiskey she informed me that it sits in barrels teeming with bacteria and yeast for god knows how long. "You're a walking petri dish," she said. Even the thought of sharing glasses appalls her. "Just imagine how many lips have touched those highball glasses, and just imagine where all those lips have been!"

I try to get her to live a little, hoping that one day she won't need somebody like me to drag her out into the world. I thought I was making progress, but after about an hour my plans were sullied by a couple of innocent nicotine addicts. They sat down behind us and lit their cigarettes, and Myra immediately started choking, ranting about emphysema and lung cancer between sips from the water she'd smuggled in with her purse.

"I can feel my chest tightening," she said. "I can feel the tobacco sticking in my alveoli!" She started a coughing fit, crying "asthma attack" even though she's never had asthma in her entire life. I was captured in another train-wreck moment as the wheezing continued and she grabbed a paper bag from the table next to ours. Unfortunately it had a few crumbs in the bottom. She took a deep breath and then doubled over, coughing wildly. All eyes in the room were focused on us. Even the neon above us ceased its flickering. I dropped my head in my hand as the two guys behind us abruptly pounded their cigarettes into the ashtray and fled to the bar.

She finally caught her breath after a few pats on the back, but it was too late. She was sure her lungs had been ruined, and muttered something about aspirating as I smashed a bottle on the table and held the glass to my throat.

"For god's sake, Myra, get a hold of yourself or I'll end it right here!"

She continued hacking, her eyes bulging. Whether it was because of asphyxiation or surprise, I couldn't tell.

"You know I don't want to make a mess, but I swear I'm about to go back on my word and make an exception."

She clutched her throat and yelled between coughs, defending her civil right to enjoy a bottle of mineral water without fear of developing emphysema.

"You can't allow yourself to have a normal day and behave like a normal person!" I yelled.

"Don't talk to me about being normal," she said. "You're a walking corpse. Every night I go to bed picturing how I'm going to find your lifeless body in the morning, and every day, I find it in the same place, slumped in a dark corner of the room, plotting its own demise, but too chicken to ever get it over with."

By then a crowd had gathered. I dropped the glass and stared at Myra in silence. The bartender took that opportunity to grab us both by the arm and shove us out onto the sidewalk, threatening to have us thrown in jail. We trudged down the street in cold, dark silence, Myra just a few steps ahead of me.

Back at the apartment, she made a beeline for the medicine cabinet to begin her nightly vitamin ritual. She stumbled across the living room and collapsed on the couch in a heap. Between half-hearted sniffles and coughs, she lined up the usual suspects. Calcium, ginkgo, iron, potassium, zinc, and the countless others, arranged on our coffee table like little Rockettes. The three aspirin I swallowed in the kitchen paled in comparison.

I handed her a glass of water to wash down the row of pills.

"That's not from the tap is it?"

I'd lie and save myself a walk back to the kitchen, but she'd just think I was trying to poison her.

I returned with a bottle of water. The label had a picture of a quiet mountain lake, somewhere in Canada, no doubt. Part of me wanted to tell her all about the exposè I saw on the nature channel about the companies that were busted for selling "crystal clear mountain spring water" when, in fact, the hidden cameras caught them filling bottles from a hose behind a gas station adjacent to an old nuclear test site. She tossed her head back, popping vitamins two at the time. She took a couple of extras to fight off any infection she may have picked up from the bar, since it is, in fact, a teeming cesspool of potential disease.

"Have you ever wondered what really goes into that?"

She stared at me blankly and started the next row. "What?"

"Nothing," I said. The truth doesn't always set you free.

I considered a massive consumption of vitamins, and wondered what a lethal dose would be. Then I realized that I probably couldn't take more than Myra had, and she was fine. Relatively speaking, that is. Even if I could overdose on ginkgo biloba, I'd probably just end up with a stomach pump and live in infamy on the back page of the local paper. And really, who wants that?

I sneezed as Burt hopped into my lap and twitched his ears. He seemed to be unfazed by my fits of coughing, ignoring them just as Myra did. I watched as she washed the last of the pills down, in alphabetical order, just out of habit. I stared at her stack of medical books, stroking Burt's ears, and realized that I couldn't leave. Not just yet, anyway. If I left, there would be no one to limit her needless doctor visits, and her insurance rates would go through the roof. Someone had to make her leave the apartment every now and then and make sure she drank something besides water. There was still hope for her, but she needed a gradual reintroduction to the natural order of things, one health hazard at a time. She needed me to be her constant, to keep her well, to take her mind off of her senseless obsession every once in a while.

Besides, I had Burt to think about now. Myra certainly wasn't going to risk rabies to feed him baby carrots and potato skins. Trapped in another moment of weakness, another selfless tangent, I hardly noticed when she leaned across the end table and scratched his downy ears.

She smiled as one ear flopped over his eye. "He's pretty cute," she said.

"Yeah," I said. "He is."

From the Belly of the Furnace

Kathy Godfrey

this man I know believes
God is speaking
under the 21st street bridge
broken down cardboard pile
on reams of bags and napkins and stolen yard sale posters
covered with divine transcription
tires thwacking across bridge seams
jotted meticulously in dashes and stops
gold fuzzing the twilight skyline twice
recorded in scrupulous accounts
across Harris Teeter bags paper not plastic
faces blowing by cold glass
eyes hollow howling all
thumbed in coal smudges
filed away with Truth not malice
without malice or forethought
this man I know captures
life as God speaks
mosaic revelation
partners
this man I know and he who spoke worlds into light

one gave life
the other agreed to live
for now keep watch over
driving rush hour between them
humming along a song that ended five miles back
tires marking time

Downtown Sociology 101
(A True Story)

Lee Sokol

I was downtown on a work errand one sunny morning last spring and had a flat tire. Luckily, there was a free parking space right by Pritchard Park. A white woman about my age (nearing 50) and carrying the book *501 Spanish Verbs* stopped to help. We were having a go at the lug nuts when a nicely dressed black man carrying a tennis racquet came out of the bank. He looked at us and said, "Women's Lib is good." Then he smiled and walked away. I told the woman to go on to wherever she was headed. As she left she said, "This is empowering." A couple of minutes later, a homeless and toothless black guy came up and said, "Let me do that. You're a woman." As he struggled with the somewhat stripped lug nuts, he mumbled, "I'm a homeless person doing a good deed. Maybe there'll be something in this for me." Finally, as he was putting the lug nuts on the spare tire, a white homeless guy tried to help him. The first guy said to him, "No, man. This one's mine."

Photograph by Joe Franklin

Lies

Carolyn Pidgeon

Twisting, tangling, twining, terrible
Vines
Tightening, strangling
As they grow
Into thick sinews
Of bestial strength.

Even the straightest, strongest oak
Succumbs
The flow of sap choked
As it reaches for the sun
And digs its feet in.
The thick merciless vines
Enmeshed in its flesh,
The vines that began
Two innocent leaves

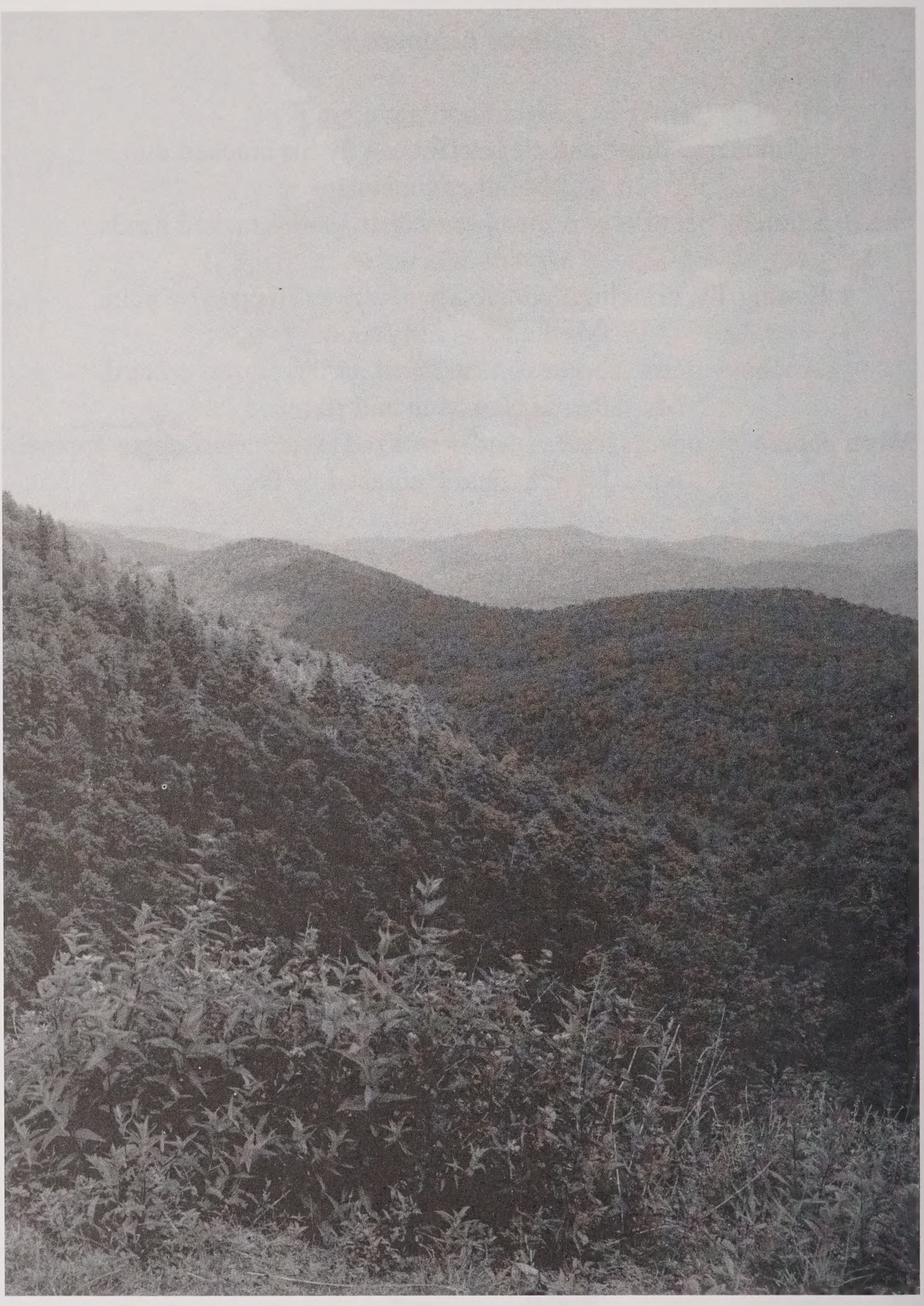
Drawing by Annie Cicale

My Father

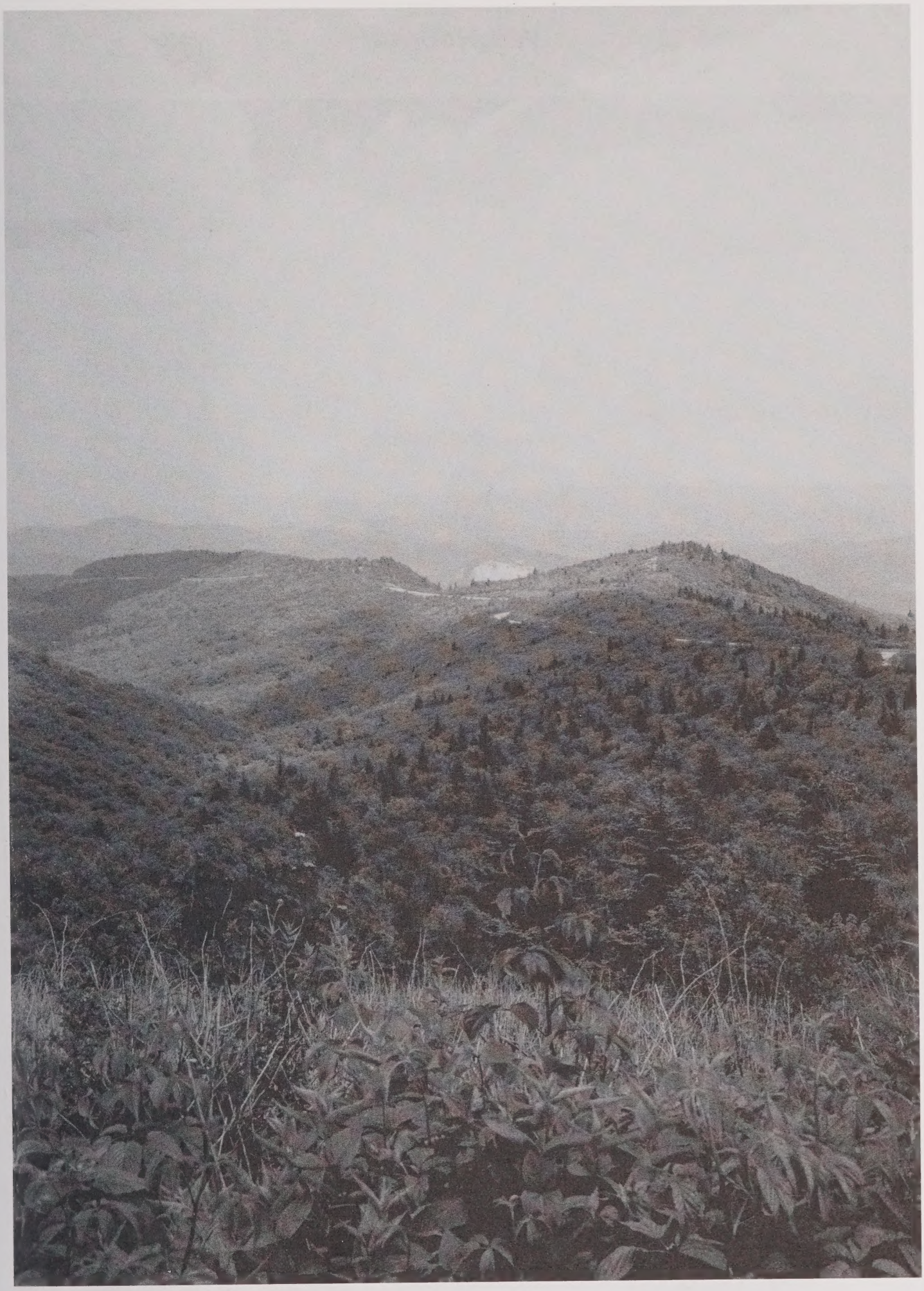
Kenet Adamson

My father is gin.
Tanqueray bitter and clean clenched by his cracked mitt.
My father is pain.
Scratchy beard, sharp smack on a butt, work-cracked hands.
My father is noise.
Blaring TV, crinkling *USA Today*, a canvas slapped by paint.
My father is fatty food.
Anchovy pizza, cheese fondue, steak tartar, frozen custard.
My father is broken-in and rumpled.
Worn paperback novel jacketed with vivid red Wisconsin Badger apparel,
a small boy's hand embraced by his.

Drawing by Annie Cicale

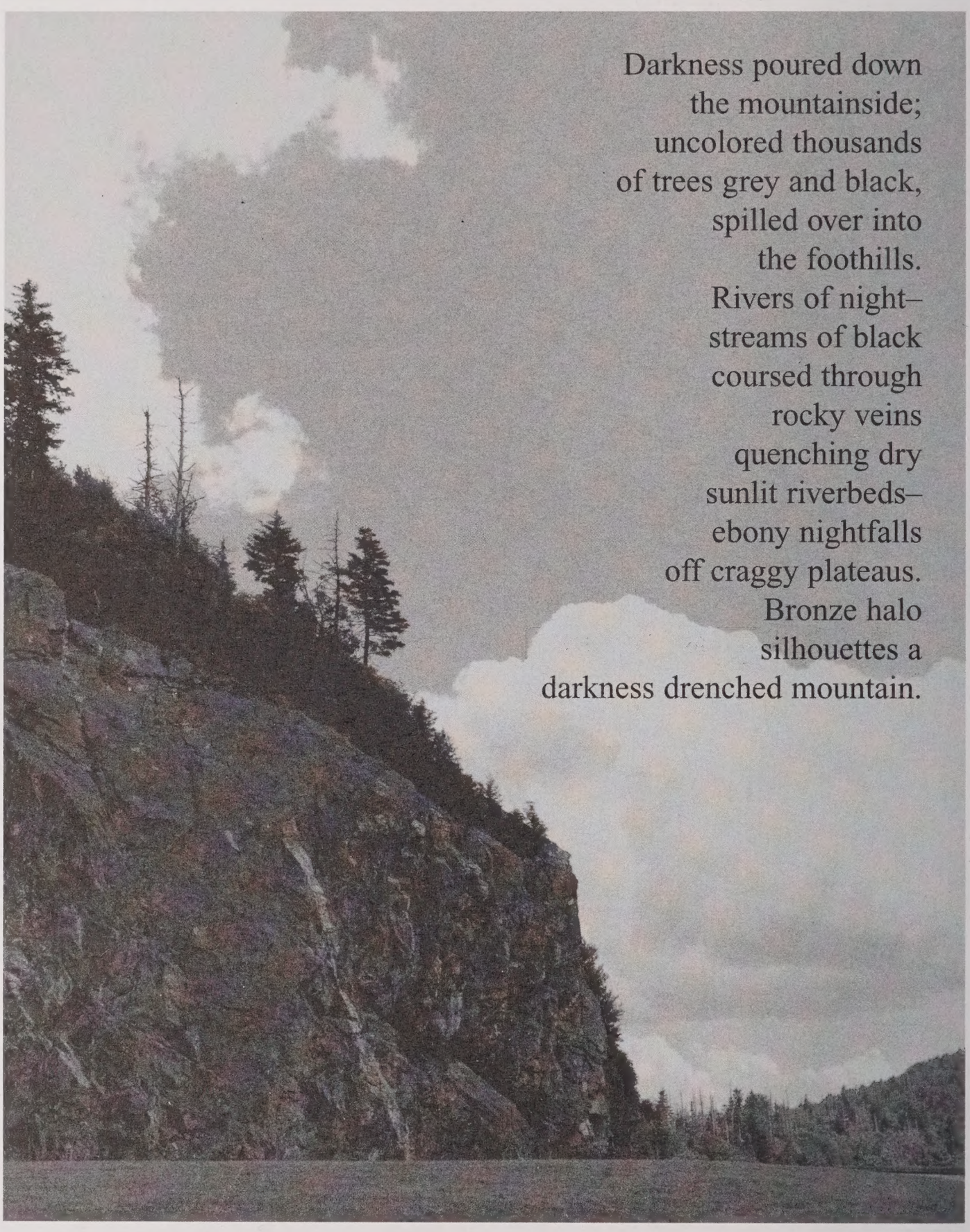


Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin



Westwindow

Will Hooper



Darkness poured down
the mountainside;
uncolored thousands
of trees grey and black,
spilled over into
the foothills.
Rivers of night–
streams of black
coursed through
rocky veins
quenching dry
sunlit riverbeds–
ebony nightfalls
off craggy plateaus.
Bronze halo
silhouettes a
darkness drenched mountain.

Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

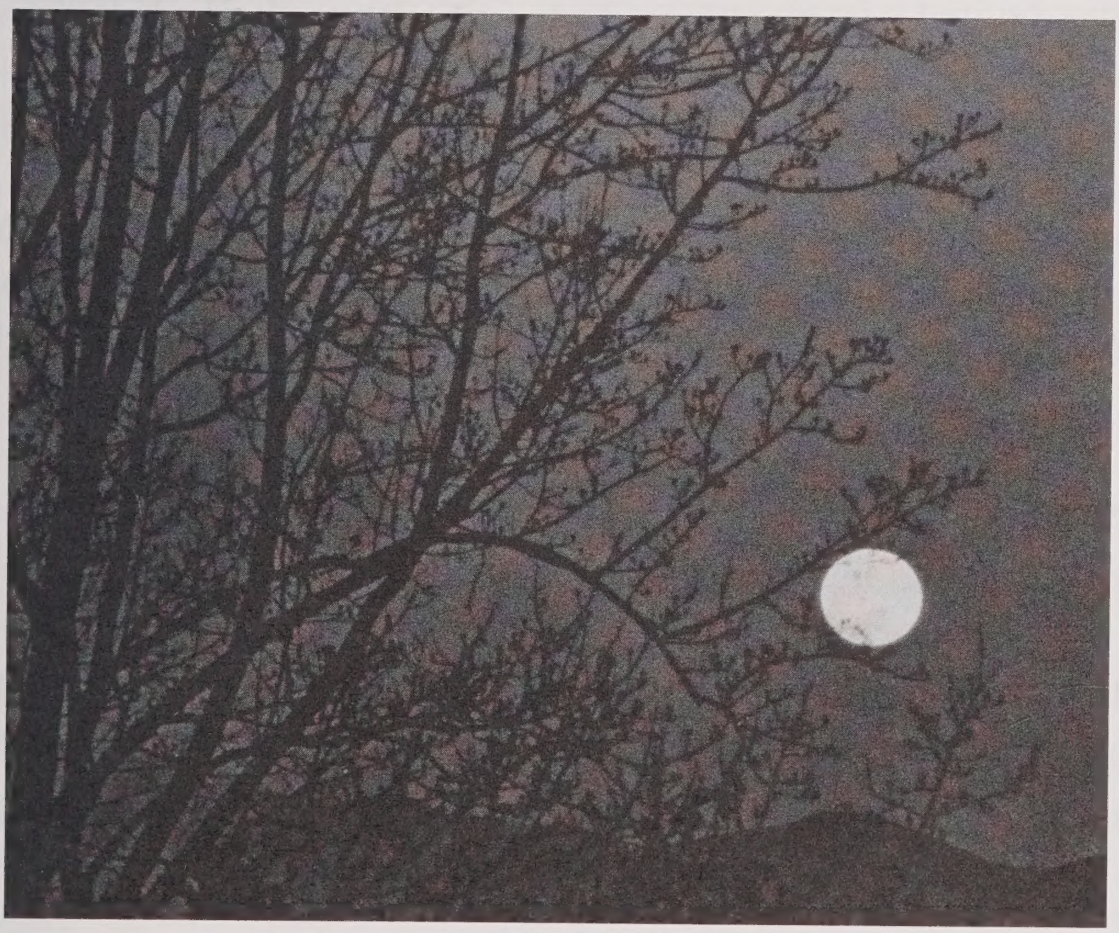
Vision

Will Hooper

Tell me tonight,
white moonshine with your parallel rays–
what and where
this awareness will be
in spacetime–tomorrow?
standing on red clay
or become clay itself?

That silent shimmering knowledge
whispered–an ivory reflection waves on water–
a fly wing on my cheek–
the yesterday-now-tomorrow–
simultaneous siblings
atop infinite wavecrests–and I–
a microcosm on a watercrust egg–
a water spider gliding the surface tension

The Future is a pressure wave preceding my arrival.



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Get Lost: A Five Minute Screenplay

David Holcombe

FADE IN:

INT. A BUSINESS CLASS MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

ROB stands in front of a television screen which is showing a woman being taken from a suburban house by police.

SUPER: "FRIDAY."

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
Vanessa Gray, called Van by her friends, was taken away from the home by police. Police were careful to point out that she was not under arrest.

Rob sits on the edge of the bed and opens a briefcase as he listens:

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
Police report receiving a cell phone from Dr. Gray saying that he had a head injury and had been locked in the trunk of his wife's car. Dr. Gray believed he was being murdered.

Rob opens the briefcase and takes out a laptop, attaches it to the internet port on the desk, opens it and pulls up a website as he listens. On the screen the police can be seen searching the trunk of a late model Honda.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
When police arrived at the house last night, Mrs. Gray was at home and her car was in the garage.

Rob puts a coded number into the search option on the Swissbanque website and pulls up a balance of $2,298,456 as he continues to listen:

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
Police report that Dr. Gray's belongings had been packed in boxes in the bedroom, but that not even his personal items like shaving kits and vitamins were missing. Gray, shown here in a recent photograph, has not been found.

The screen shows Rob with a mustache, sideburns, and darker, longer hair, wearing glasses.

Rob walks to the front of the screen and looks at his picture on the screen and at himself in the mirror beside the television. His new grooming makes him look younger and sharp. He smiles as he continues to listen:

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
Police report finding blood in the trunk of Mrs. Gray's car, and are planning to test for DNA. Mrs. Gray's alleged boyfriend has also been picked up . . .

CUT TO:

ROB AND VANESSA'S GARAGE - NIGHT.

SUPER: "THE DAY BEFORE - THURSDAY"

Rob comes into the garage carrying a bag of trash.

ROB
(over his shoulder, into the house)
I'm putting out the trash!

VANESSA (O.S.)
(from inside the house)
Yeah, yeah!

Rob puts the bag down beside the trash can, and then opens the trunk of the Honda. He lifts the carpet and takes out a clear Ziploc bag containing a large culinary knife. He takes a pair of latex gloves out of his pocket and puts them on. Rob takes a new blood sample syringe out of his

doctor's bag which is in the trunk. He then correctly draws blood from his left arm. He uses the needle to put blood onto the knife in the bag, closes the bag, and then places it in the bottom of the empty trash can–placing the bag of trash on top of it.

VANESSA (O.S.)
(from the house)
You going to stay out there all night?

ROB
(smiling)
No!

Rob puts the rest of the blood from the syringe on the gloves and then smears the blood around the trunk on the right side and around the back of the lip of the opening.

ROB
I'm just tidying up.

Rob disassembles the syringe and puts it back in its cardboard box, then takes off his left glove, leaving the syringe and box inside. Then he takes off his right glove leaving the left glove and box inside and then places them in his pant pocket. He picks up the briefcase and his cell phone from the trunk and quietly closes the car trunk, leaving his doctor's bag inside.

Rob walks out of the garage leaving the light on and the door open. He dials 911 on the phone.

ROB
(as he disappears into the dark woods behind the house)
Hello? 911? Get me the police.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DMV - DAY.

SUPER: "WEDNESDAY"

Rob comes out looking at his new driver's license.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP - ROB'S NEW DRIVER'S LICENSE AND NAME

CUT TO:

EXT. RENTAL CAR AGENCY - DAY

Rob comes out of the agency office walks to a car carrying a key and gets in, with the rental car agreement in his hand, along with a briefcase. Rob unlocks the car, gets in, and drives out of the lot in the rental car.

CUT TO:

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

On the seat beside Rob are a rental car agreement, a birth certificate, a Social Security card, a college diploma, a resume, and other identifying papers. All the documents bear his new name. Also on the seat are his laptop, cell phone, and a smart briefcase.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY.

Rob comes out of the mall carrying shopping bags, clothes on hangers in store bags, and luggage. He opens the trunk and places the items inside alongside other items: new shoes in boxes, hats, ties, underwear in packages, toiletry items, etc.

DISSOLVE TO:

LAPTOP COMPUTER SCREEN

SUPER: "TUESDAY"

On the screen is the Swissbangue web page. "Transfer complete" appears on the screen. The Swissbanque page is exited. "www.idanew.com" is typed into the search option. The "Identity ANEW" web page appears. On the page is "How to get real IDs, birth certificates, social security, driver's license, credit cards, diplomas, all new verifiable documents for your new identity."

CUT TO:

CEMETARY - DAY.
Rob walks among the tombstones, looking for something. He kneels down and brushes grass clippings from a small stone set flat in the ground. The stone reads "Austin Bryan Miller, Born November 2, 1956, Died May 24,1957"–the name and birth date seen on Rob's new identity documents.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE KITCHEN IN ROB AND VANESSA'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

SUPER: "MONDAY"

Rob is wearing yellow dishwashing gloves while he washes pots and pans from dinner preparation. VANESSA is at the counter chopping vegetables for a salad with the large culinary knife.

VANESSA
Soooo, basically, that's it. I know that you've known, how could you not know?

ROB
How would I know?

Vanessa puts down the knife and carries the salads to the dining room.

VANESSA (O.S.)
Don't be a jerk! It's over, and that's it.

Vanessa comes back in and gets the already filled dinner plates and returns to the dining room as she SPEAKS:

VANESSA

I'm packing your stuff this week, and I expect you to be out of the house on Saturday.

ROB

(finishing the dishes)

So you can move your new boyfriend in on Sunday?

Vanessa comes in and pours two glasses of white wine.

VANESSA

Can we be a little civilized here?

ROB

Sure, just like Noel Coward.

Vanessa takes the two glasses into the dining room.

VANESSA (O.S.)

I'd rather spend the rest of my life in jail than to spend one more week with you. So after Friday, you can just get lost!

Rob gets out a large Ziplock bag, carefully picks up the culinary knife from the counter, and places it in the bag. He smiles as he holds the bag up by the corner, looking at it.

ROB

Whatever.

FADE TO BLACK.

Etching by Shirley McLaughlin

Winter Snakes

Randee Goodstadt

Two little silver snakes curled up
On a low-growing lavender plant:
It's Jan. 4, 2004
And although it's January, it's 65 degrees.

Yet they appear to sleep
Enjoying the warmth
Maybe enjoying the pungent
Sweetness of lavender?

Imagine a snake
Having preferences:
Choosing lavender rather
Than tarragon or rosemary.

What kind of snakes are silver when small?
I've never seen this kind before,
Although I'm always glad
To see snakes in my garden.

I leave them be,
After stroking their scales, such a smooth feel!
Let them sleep, enjoy the sun and the lavender
While I go about my way.

(Author's Note: I easily discovered, thanks to the wonder of Google and the Internet, that these were probably Earth Snakes, and that field biologists are uncertain of their precise range because they aren't often seen. In devotion to science, I sent an email to the biologist who posted that information, telling him of my sighting.)

México, Mi Amor

Richard J. DeLuca

Five-thirty. I was headed home on the interstate when traffic suddenly slowed to less than thirty miles an hour. Drivers began to pump their brakes and angle onto the shoulder to avoid rear-end collisions. Everyone seemed to be as distracted as I was by the scarlet and indigo striped sunset.

I cracked the sunroof and turned on NPR. *All Things Considered.* A report about an exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington caught my attention. Conceived and presented by Guillermo Gómez Peña, a Mexican-born artist. I turned up the volume.

The Temple of Confessions. Mexicans on display for American museum-goers to ogle and confess to.

"I display myself with my colleagues as a human artifact, as a cultural specimen inside of a plexiglass box. And I am a de facto piece of art," explained Gómez Peña.

"My God, this is wonderful!" I said out loud, as I listened to his lilting pronunciation.

"One of our many characters is the Mexterminator...who beats up border patrolmen and Los Angeles cops...who seduces blonde women, who infects English language with Spanish."

Gómez Peña went on to describe some of the other Mexican stereotypes represented in his *tableau vivant*: Sampocho Aztlaneca, a curio shop shaman for spiritual tourists, the pre-Colombian *vato*, a kind of holy gang member.

"And there are kneelers in front of this human artifact, and people can kneel in front of us and confess into a mike."

The altered voice of each confessor had an eerie resonance, as if it were the soul's own voice revealing its deep fear and secret hatred of Mexicans. Fear and hatred. According to Gómez Peña, "People are no longer willing to work out the complexities of intercultural and interracial relations." Of course not. Fear and hatred are easier.

What would I confess, if I were kneeling in front of this living diorama? I asked myself. How could I describe my lifelong love affair with Mexico?

•••

Traffic was thinning as my taxi circled the Monument to Independence and began working its way to the outside lane in anticipation of a right turn at Calle Amberes. I looked up at *el Angel*, her golden wings extended, a triumphal wreath in her raised right hand, a length of broken chain in her left.

When I first saw it twenty-seven years earlier, the statue of winged victory stood crated and waiting to be returned to its position above Paseo de la Reforma. During the earthquake of 1957, the year before, *el Angel* had toppled from its one-hundred-thirty-foot column, prompting *capitalinos* to refer to it as the *fallen angel*. Perhaps it was also emblematic of the rise and fall of Mexico's fortunes.

My taxi turned right into Calle Hamburgo, struggling through the congested, narrow street, past turn-of-the-century mansions hidden by walls topped with broken glass, past boutiques, jewelry stores, antique shops, a bookstore and flower vendors.

Familiar smells. Diesel fumes, wet paving stones, ripe papayas, meat cooking over charcoal. The burnt coffee aroma of a Delicado. And the soul-satisying smell of tortillas baking on a *comal*.

Familiar sounds. The unnerving rasp of worn brake shoes, a few bars of a *cumbia*, the whisper of bundled twigs sweeping the sidewalk. And empty green glass bottles clanging like ships' bells in their metal cradles, as an ancient truck heaves and gasps from restaurant to restaurant delivering water.

Then the lobby of the Galería Plaza. Slivers of conversations.

"*Ándale, pues. Nos vemos mañana.*"

"*Víctor Martínez para servirle.*"

"*...parece que no hay remedio.*"

"*Francamente no sé qué decirte, pero...*"

And then, "*Bienvenido, señor de Luca.*"

México. *La capital*. Home at last.

Follow Your Heart

Donna Helen Crisp

A heart opens out of fear or surrender.
Because sometimes it is easier to love than to hate.
Because life goes by in a second
and love counts high on eternity's list.

A heart closes out of fear or ego.
Because sometimes it is too hard to love.
Because *fairness* shouts "no"
and there is no eternity inside despair.

A heart bends and breaks and mends and heals
and scar tissue can yield strength
for love to begin its journey inside *us*
and then *love is all there is*, into forever.

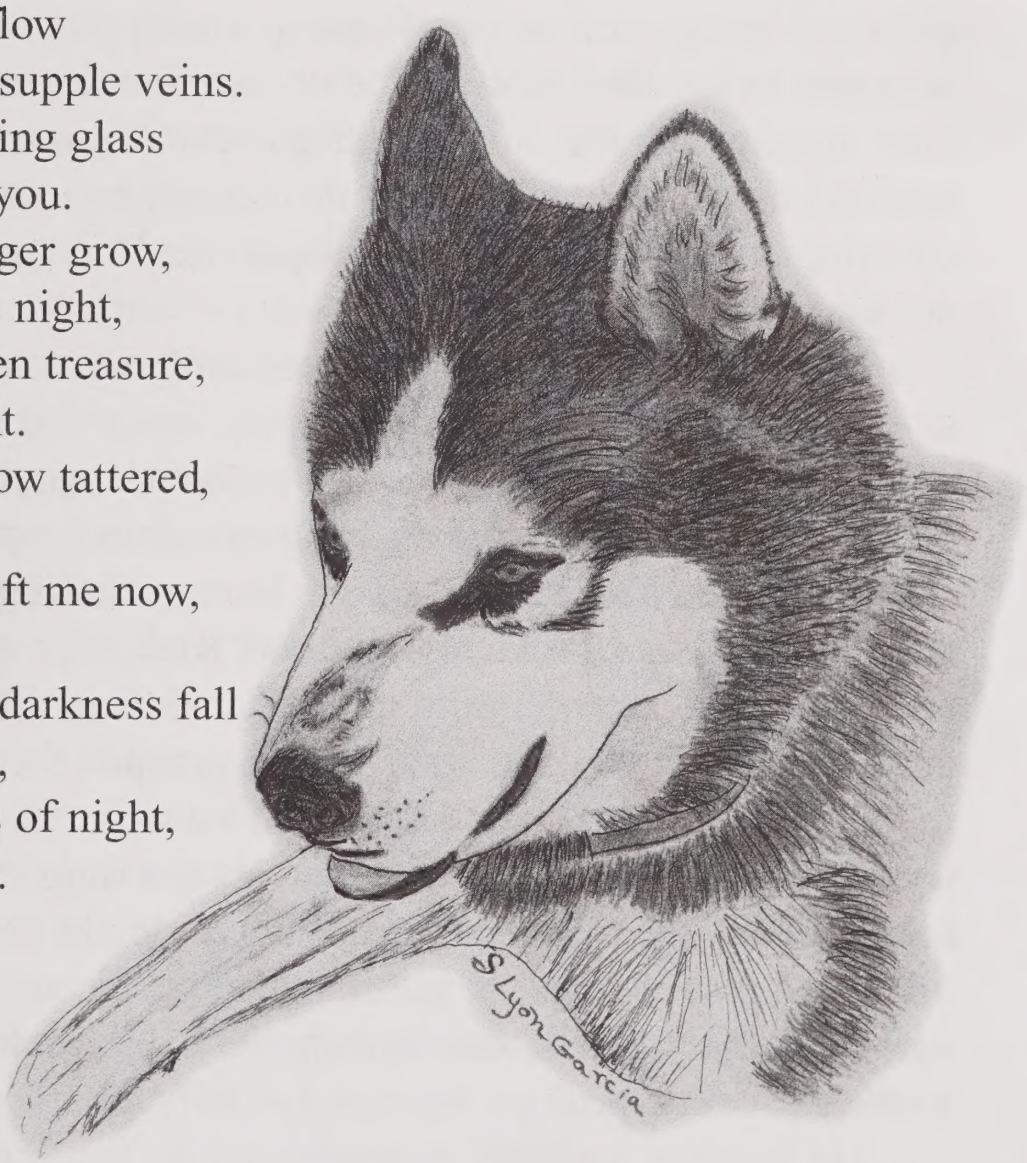
A heart opens or closes out of fear
because sometimes we welcome the unknown
and sometimes we cannot get out of our own way
and love anoints us or leaves us alone.

This life is a tiny moment
expanded by love or contracted in sorrow.
May we all use our suffering
to guide us into eternity's loving arms.

Untitled

Joe Allawos

sitting sheltered in your arms,
to dream a dream of openness.
please sit still, my looking glass,
sit still and let me see.
an openness so rare, so fine,
so flowing like I've never known
but an openness, you say,
that I shall never, ever own.
with wind the witness, river's guide,
just give to me my simple vice;
inebriate me, looking glass,
medicate me, make me wise.
give in, let me live to know,
just how powerful the flow
that courses thru those supple veins.
please sit still, my looking glass
and let me look inside you.
and as the shadows longer grow,
and longer still towards night,
you leave me but a token treasure,
before you take to flight.
the canvas of my sail now tattered,
my rudder all askew,
my looking glass has left me now,
I've nothing left to do,
but wait and watch the darkness fall
and watch the river roll,
and wish upon the stars of night,
my looking glass's soul.



Drawing by Shirley Lyon Garcia

A Possum Named Saddam
Dec. 13, 2003

Chris Tibbetts

The hiss came unexpectedly, raspy and threatening, at odds with the cumbersome appearance of the creature. My instinctual panic at the sight of the razor-edged pointy teeth was not at all justified–he was my captive. As the middle-of-the-night quiet descended again, I contemplated what to do with the creature before me. Through the cat carrier's metal grate, we watched each other closely, evaluating the other's potential to do bodily harm. I meant him no harm, but he couldn't know that.

Yet again, as he had many nights before, the possum had interrupted my slumber with his ungraceful clambering through the kitty door and the click-click of his clawed feet on the wood floor. His destination? My cats' food bowls. Crunching the kibble with a volume unknown to more subtle feline gourmands, he would eat quickly, oblivious to my curious cats forming a wary semi-circle around the stranger. At my first footfall, the possum would always run back to the kitty door, giving me only a brief glimpse of his long, whip-like tail as he scurried through the opening in the door, the violent flap of the plastic covering punctuating his abrupt departure. This time, though, he would not escape–I had a plan!

The next time I heard the possum's signature clicking, I rose slowly so as not to make the bed creak, tiptoed to the kitty door, and quickly slid the cover down over the plastic flap, thereby preventing the possum's escape. The animal's instinct was to run, and run he did–around and around the house, with a crazy human chasing him, broom in hand. All the commotion woke my husband, Rick, who came shuffling sleepily from the bedroom, squinting to make meaning of the scene without the aid of his contact lenses. Once he had grasped the situation, he came to my aid by trying to block the possum's escape, like a sleepy soccer goalie trying to block a penalty kick. The cats too were dashing about to find hiding places, alarmed by the unusual midnight ruckus. During a brief lull in the proceedings, as we tried to shoo the possum out from under the sofa, Rick said, with a tone of disbelief, "You realize we're living a southern stereotype?"

Eventually we corralled the creature in the bathroom, pulling the door shut behind the captive. I wanted to immediately carry out the "capture and release" plan I had formulated, but my husband vehemently disagreed, saying it could wait until the morning. Rick, normally a very sweet and generous man during daytime hours, could be quite cranky if roused from his sleep, so I gave in, agreeing the "release" part of the plan could wait a few hours. As we tucked ourselves back under the quilts, I jokingly named our animal prisoner "Saddam"; news of the Iraqi dictator's capture had been flooding news reports all day.

Our Saddam had an enormous appetite. He was very fond of cat food–in all its forms. Did I mention that the cats' litter box is in the bathroom? From the darkness of the bedroom I listened to the scratching and crunching of the excavation, imagining with horror the midnight snacking. Surely the Geneva Convention has some guideline against such rations, no matter how nutritious? My resolve mounted as I again got out of bed. My husband remained still on his side of the bed, pretending to sleep. Despite my squeamishness, I decided I could handle this myself.

Retrieving the cat carrier from the basement caused my cats to panic and run for cover a second time. As I reassured them by cooing, "no, don't worry, no midnight vet visits for you," I eased open the bathroom door just a bit, and placed the carrier's open side at the door, allowing no exit except into the receptacle itself. The animal came dashing out, only to be confined in the cubicle. I slammed shut the carrier door with a gleeful bang and a yelled out to my husband in the bedroom, "We got him!" No reply came from him other than an exasperated sigh. Poor guy; it was hard enough living with an insomniac wife, without adding the complication of a nocturnal wild animal.

My curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to look a little more closely, as the only possums I had seen up to now had been road kill. I turned on the hallway light and peered into the carrier. My captive was a pretty big specimen, having gorged himself nightly at my expense for a month. He had a cute face, with beady dark eyes sitting atop his long pointed muzzle, capped with a pink, wiggling nose. His plush fur featured multiple shades of grey with a white undercoat. I was amazed at the feet–each pink toe was fully jointed. I moved in closer for a look at his amazingly long claws...mistake! My impression of him as cute changed in a millisecond at his fierce hiss, reeking of litter box breath. Now that his captor appeared on the defensive, Saddam initiated his

escape attempt, trying to dig his way through the plastic of the carrier. Seeing the possum's claws frantically prying through the air holes of the carrier, I decided that now was the time for action, not nature study.

I barged into the bedroom, where my beloved was just drifting off to sleepy land again. So much for independence: "Honey, we need to take Saddam to Beaver Lake, now!"

"Not now–it's the middle of the night! We'll take him in the morning."

"But he's so frightened in the carrier that he's trying to dig his way out."

"I really need my sleep; just put the carrier on the porch."

"But it's below freezing out there–he'll be cold and have no way to burrow!"

"He's an animal!"

"Fine! I'll take care of it myself!" was my petulant response.

"Mmmph...," was his reply.

This is the type of adventure that surely tests spousal patience. Fully awake, I put my coat on over my pajamas and slipped on some shoes and socks. Lugging the carrier containing what must have been 15 pounds of possum weight outside, I looked at the car, ruefully contemplating a trip across town to Beaver Lake. Cold, tired, and frustrated, I decided to alter my plan slightly. I turned my back on the car and walked to the normally traffic-filled Five Points intersection. At this time of night the street was eerily still and quiet, the red and green stoplights changing for the benefit of a lone pedestrian and her captive. I crossed the street to the grassy bank on the opposite side, my goal the wooded area underneath the small overpass. There was a streambed that ran through the area–a good home for a possum, I thought.

Without ceremony, I opened the cage door. The creature, scared of the unknown, remained in his confined space. I tipped the carrier slightly, letting gravity do its work. The possum ran down into the ravine created by the streambed, and then, once he had reached the bottom, stopped abruptly. "Just getting his bearings," I mused. Just as suddenly, however, he turned on a dime, and ran just as fast up the hill, past me and the carrier I ineffectually placed in his path, across the street, heading toward my house! I just stood there with my mouth open in dismay and disbelief, a failed liberator. All that middle-of-the-night drama for nothing!

I dejectedly made my way back inside; my husband, shoes on and contacts in, queried, "Where did you go? Let's get this over with..."

"I already let him loose."

"Why didn't you wait for me? Where?" Purposely ignoring the first question, I replied to the second, "Across the street."

"Across the street?! That's like capturing Saddam Hussein and letting him go in Iraq!" I considered explaining why his analogy wasn't an entirely correct one, what with the whole Sunni/Shiite Muslim thing, but reconsidered; it could wait until morning after all!

Two-color wood engraving by Lauren Faulkenberry

Asheville, Rose Byrne, and the "Golden Age"

Joe Franklin

On Monday, October 27, 1902, St. Agnes Catholic Church was crowded with friends and colleagues of one of Brooklyn's greatest doctors. Members of the Brooklyn Medical Society, the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, St. Mary's Ladies Aid Society, and the staff of Long Island Medical Hospital attended the solemn requiem high mass. The entire staff of St. Mary's hospital served as honorary pallbearers for John Byrne.

Conspicuously missing from the service were Dr. Byrne's wife, Mary Winifred, and two daughters, Evelyn and Rose. The family's old menace would not relinquish its grip, not even for his funeral. At the time of Dr. Byrne's death, Rose was so sick that Mrs. Byrne and Evelyn remained in Europe with Rose while Dr. Byrne's body was shipped backed to Brooklyn for the funeral. Their decision not to attend the service fueled speculation about Rose's condition and the health of the remaining Byrne family. Their absence contributed to the sadness over Dr. Byrne's passing and his family's struggle with tuberculosis.

John Byrne died suddenly of heart disease in Montreux, Switzerland, on Wednesday, October 1. He had addressed the International Obstetrical Congress on September 18 concerning new methods of fighting cancer. At age 72, Dr. Byrne was considered an authority on the treatment of uterine cancer and his remarks were enthusiastically received by members of the Congress. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* covered his passing with bold headlines befitting a celebrity or a great scientist. Indeed, John Byrne had become something of a hero to the people of Brooklyn and a respected colleague in the medical community. A friend said that he died of worry. Others said that melancholy hastened his death.

On Saturday, February 15, 1902, Dr. Byrne, his wife and two daughters left Brooklyn for an extended tour of Europe. Publicly, the reason for this trip was rest and relaxation. Dr. Byrne planned to visit some of the great medical institutions of Europe. The winter would be spent in Paris with tours of Ireland, England and Germany. However, the real reason for the trip was known to almost everyone in Brooklyn.

By early 1902, the Byrnes had witnessed the illness, death, funeral and burial of eleven children. The most recent loss was Mary Winifred (named after her mother). She died on January 16, 1902. Her

death followed closely the death of Dr. Byrne's sole surviving son, John Dever Byrne, June 16, 1901. The cause of death for both adult children was tuberculosis.

Following Mary Winifred's death, the *Eagle* ran a story, "Seventh Child is Dead: Despite All Precautions. Consumption Claims Another Victim in Family of Dr. John Byrne." Although the *Eagle* had treated Dr. Byrne and his family with utmost respect, this particular story seemed to cross the line of professional journalism. Dr. Byrne was no stranger to the public spotlight. The *Eagle* frequently carried stories about the notable surgeon-in-chief of St. Mary's Hospital and his many accomplishments. However, the cause of Mary's death, or for that matter, the deaths of his other children, was a private matter, and Dr. Byrne went to great lengths to keep it so.

Nevertheless, the *Eagle* could not ignore the mounting tragedy that afflicted the Byrne family. The cause of Mary Winifred's death was publicly attributed to consumption. It was most ironic that a prominent Brooklyn physician could not isolate the cause of this disease or protect his remaining children from its onslaught. Further, Dr. and Mrs. Byrne had reportedly searched their genealogies for traces of the disease, but no evidence of a familial connection could be found.

Not only grief stricken by Mary Winifred's death, Dr. Byrne was also burdened by the public interest created by news of another family tragedy. The stigma of tuberculosis made many families recoil from public scrutiny, but for a leading physician to lose most of his children by this dreaded disease challenged his professional integrity. Certainly this well-known physician would lose the confidence of his patients, not to mention what his colleagues might think, if he couldn't control the menace of consumption in his own home.

If anyone could protect his family from tuberculosis, it would be John Byrne. His insistence on sanitary clinical practice and his systematic methods of treatment offered the Byrne children every defense available. Further, he had more than adequate financial resources and contacts with the finest doctors in Brooklyn. He was in a position to benefit from the latest and most efficacious diagnostic techniques. All of this, however, was to no avail.

As expected, the *Eagle*'s account of Mary Winifred's death did not sit well with the Byrne family. Although it is not known what transpired between Dr. Byrne and the *Eagle* staff after the story of Mary's death, the next day, the paper printed an apologetic retraction with the headline:

"Death of Miss Mary Byrne: Consumption Not the Cause of Seven Deaths in the Family."

The *Eagle* made every effort to repair the damage to Dr. Byrne's reputation and his broken heart. "Some erroneous reports as to the cause of Miss Byrne's death have been published, it being stated that she died of consumption. This is not the case, nor has it been the case with regard to the deaths of seven members of Dr. Byrne's family. It is true that there have been cases of tuberculosis in the family, but Miss Byrne (Mary Winifred) was not afflicted with that disease and the surviving members of the family are in perfect health."

Unfortunately, the retraction made matters worse. The overt attempt to deny the cause of death simply fueled speculation about the relentless siege of tuberculosis. By now, the damage had been done and many friends and observers were concerned about Dr. Byrne's welfare.

The growing spotlight only added to Dr. Byrne's mental exhaustion. On Friday, February 14, Dr. Byrne said he would close his residence at 314 Clinton Street and take his family to Europe. Tickets were purchased for the steamship *Minneapolis* of the Atlantic Transport Company.

The aging doctor announced plans to continue his medical practice after the extended trip to Europe, but in a limited capacity. He would change his residence, too. By now, he probably suspected contamination at his home. Perhaps he would move to Manhattan on his return, as was the talk among friends and colleagues.

News of Dr. Byrne's intentions to leave for Europe reverberated through the medical community. Friends and family were sympathetic to the Byrne family tragedies and saddened to see them leave. Colleagues at St. Mary's Hospital arranged to honor their surgeon-in-chief with a reception at the Crescent Club at 5 p.m. on February 14. Many physicians from across Brooklyn attended the event and offered farewell gifts for their beloved colleague and his family.

The next day, a large crowd met at the steamer's dock to wish the Byrnes farewell. It was reported that gifts and floral arrangements covered the state rooms. Although Dr. Byrne said the trip was for "a respite" from his many years of labor as a physician, he and Mrs. Byrne were now worried about their younger daughter, Rose, who was showing signs of the same disease that afflicted her brothers and sisters. The Byrnes left at 10 a.m. on Saturday, February 15, to seek "new surroundings and an entire change of life."

Dr. and Mrs. Byrne demonstrated remarkable strength despite the death of eleven children. They conducted affairs with dignity and humility. Following the death of each child, they dedicated themselves more fervently to the charitable work of healing.

An extended trip to Europe was not out of character for the Byrne family, but almost everyone knew that this trip would bring closure to the 50-year career of John Byrne. The city of Brooklyn would lose a great humanitarian and the medical community would feel his absence most keenly. Indeed, when the steamship Minneapolis set sail for Europe, John Byrne would say his final farewell to friends and colleagues. A few months later he would die suddenly in Switzerland.

Following Dr. Byrne's death, his daughter Rose eventually recovered and returned to the U.S. with her mother and sister. While Rose's condition improved, Evelyn became ill. Four years later, Evelyn, 33, died on Sunday, September 9, 1906. Predictably, the cause of her death was "pulmonary tuberculosis." Now, only Rose and her mother survived the once large family of fifteen.

Shortly after Evelyn's funeral, Mary and Rose moved to Asheville. "The Land of the Sky," described as a wonderful "plateau, diversified and irregular though it be, undulating between the shadows of the rippling Swannanoa to the base of sun tipped mountain crags, with numberless giant peaks as sentinels, rivals even the Rockies." The small mountain town had become a center for the treatment of tuberculosis. It was well known to Brooklynites who were searching for clear mountain air, clean water and a moderate climate. Many Asheville resorts were routinely advertised in the *Eagle*, including the Battery Park Hotel, the Kenilworth Inn and Mr. Vanderbilt's estate.

Many affluent people were drawn to Asheville for rehabilitation and found the scenic beauty, moderate climate and natural amenities to their liking. Consequently, Asheville noticed an influx of wealthy immigrants, those with enough financial resources to move to the city and build homes and businesses. Some of the nation's finest doctors made Asheville their home, including C. V. Reynolds, Westray Battle, W. L. Dunn and others.

After staying at the Ridgeway Boarding House (currently the site of St. Joseph's Hospital), Rose and her mother moved to Milfoil Cottage in Albemarle Park. This picturesque community was the vision of Thomas Wadley Raoul. He, too, was in poor health and moved to Asheville to recover. While here, he converted the family farm on Charlotte Street to a famous development.

News of Mr. Raoul's community traveled quickly to Brooklyn. In 1899, the *Eagle* featured the southern resort: "One of the most notable achievements of Asheville attractions is the opening of the Manor Resort Inn and cottages, erected by the Albemarle Park Company. The park contains thirty-four acres and extends from Asheville suburbs to points in the mountain beyond Sunset Drive. B. L. Gilbert of New York is the architect. The new resort may be reached via the Southern Railroad, which touches at all the attractive resorts of the South. Asheville is one of the most popular of the Southern Railroad's numerous winter resorts."

Soon Rose and her mother developed a wide circle of friends in Asheville. Among them, Amy Colyer would become their closest. Amy was the daughter of landscape architect Charles Thomas Colyer. Amy and Rose were both daughters of distinguished fathers and they enjoyed each other's company.

Seven years after Rose arrived in Asheville, she suffered another loss. Mary Winifred Byrne, 72, died on Wednesday, February 19, 1913, at Milfoil Cottage. Mary's physician, Dr. W. L. Dunn, an Asheville surgeon and tuberculosis specialist, attributed her death to uremia (kidney failure). Mrs. Byrne's body was sent to Brooklyn, accompanied by Rose, for interment in the family plot at Holy Cross Cemetery. A requiem mass was celebrated, February 22, at 10:30 a.m., St. Agnes Church. Like other members of the Byrne family, no marker was erected to her memory.

After her mother's funeral, Rose Byrne returned to Asheville and purchased a tract of land from Thomas Wadley Raoul. The property was located on Macon Avenue. Miss Byrne's neighbors were Dr. C. V. Reynolds to the southwest, and the Asheville Country Club (currently the Grove Park Golf Course) to the north-east. Edwin W. Grove's new resort, under construction, was only a short walk up the street. Her newly acquired property was adorned with dogwood, rhododendron, wild azalea and redbud. Part of the land was forested with hardwood trees including oak and maple. The slope of the property, or the "precipitous declivity" as some called it, provided wonderful views of the winter sunset.

Rose contracted Charles N. Parker to design the cottages for her newly acquired property. His brother, Harry Parker, designed the roads and driveways. Unfortunately, Rose would not live to see the Parker brothers' most noted project, the Grove Arcade in downtown Asheville. Harry Parker was E. W. Grove's manager of investments and engineering. He prepared the site plans for the huge arcade project. His brother Charles was the architect.

Rose immediately (in 1913) built two cottages near Macon Avenue: "Rosemary" and "Primrose." She established residency in "Rosemary" and rented "Primrose." Approximately two years later, Rose expanded her real estate investment with three additional cottages: "Rambler," "Westview" and "Blossoms." A sixth cottage, "Violet," was added by 1920. Each cottage included a sleeping porch for tubercular tenants. Rose enjoyed several wonderful years in the Sunset Terrace community.

During the summer months of 1924, Rose and Amy rented a cottage in Highlands, North Carolina. Just as her father sought healthy destinations for the Byrne children when illness threatened, Rose found Highlands to be the ideal retreat, given her declining health. Not only was it near Asheville, Highlands also offered high altitude, clean air and many opportunities for outdoor exercise.

On Sunday, July 27, Rose became gravely ill. Dr. H. P. P. Thompson attended Rose from Monday until she died at 12:15 p.m., Tuesday, July 29. She slipped into a coma and diabetes finally claimed her weakened body at age 44. Amy was by her side. Although Rose lived longer than any Byrne sibling, her life was also cut short by disease. No surviving relatives remained.

Rose Byrne's body was transported to Asheville by truck and then to Brooklyn by train. She is interred in the family plot in Holy Cross Cemetery. Her grave lies in a section called, "Front of the Chapel," Range 10, Plot 111.

Thirteen members of the Byrne family are buried at Holy Cross Cemetery in the large plot acquired by Dr. Byrne in May 1880. The burial plot is conspicuous by the absence of individual grave markers. Two modest, surface-mounted markers offer tribute to the entire family. The first marker, approximately 8 by 11 inches, simply reads, "Dr. Byrne." The other marker, of the same size, is inscribed, "No. 109 to 112, S. 10."

The only monument in Asheville attributable to Rose Byrne or any of her family is in St. Lawrence Basilica–an elegant six-foot statue of St. Rose of Lima in the church proper. The statue was given to St. Lawrence Church by Rose at the dedication of the Church in 1909. Church records have little else to say about Rose Byrne or her mother.

Although her story is almost forgotten, her legacy lives on in the Basilica of St. Lawrence and the cottages of Sunset Terrace.

The Kiss

Julia Nunnally Duncan

On that warm November day at the North Carolina interstate rest stop, the man paced back and forth on the sidewalk. He wore beige cotton Dockers and a white long-sleeved shirt with the sleeves rolled to just below the elbows. His feet were bare.

Finally he went to a concrete picnic table under the Virginia pines and sat and clasped his hands.

He was quite good looking, Ursula thought as she watched him. He reminded her of Richard Chamberlain in *The Thorn Birds*: late forties, a neat professional type–maybe a college professor. His hair, more gray than dark blond, was cut neatly, yet long enough–just touching his collar–to make him pretty, almost effeminate. In fact, Ursula's first thought was that he was waiting for a male lover. She'd heard about such rest stop meetings between gay men.

One thing was certain: he was waiting, and he was anxious. The first to arrive to some scheduled tryst, he peered at the busy entrance ramp, checking his gold wrist watch often.

Ursula couldn't help but look at him as she chewed her Smithfield Barbeque sandwich, keeping her eye also on Olivia, her year-old baby who slept in a baby carrier that rested on top of the table, and on Glenn, her husband–their first trip as a threesome to Pine Knoll Shores on the North Carolina coast.

Yet the nervous man intrigued her enough to make her say to Glenn, "He's waiting for his lover." The man did, of course, wear a wedding band.

Glenn didn't respond, concentrating on his sandwich.

Suddenly the man rose and went to a red car, so quickly Ursula almost missed it.

The woman's car was parked a few yards away.

He went to her driver's side, to her rolled down window, and gave her a light kiss on the lips. Then she reached to unlock his passenger side door and he entered the car.

Five minutes hadn't passed until Ursula looked and to her amazement, he took the woman's face firmly in his hands and bent back her head and kissed her mouth.

Oh, Ursula thought, I'm witnessing a dark secret–perhaps one of many rendezvous for this couple–or was it the first real one?

He's left some workplace during his lunch hour to meet this woman, she concluded. Maybe they live in not-so-nearby Greensboro or Winston-Salem. Ursula knew he would not tell his wife how he had spent his lunch hour.

The woman was young–no surprise–maybe in her mid twenties, her blond hair pulled back in a perky ponytail and her car sporting a magnetic Jazzercize sign on its door, making Ursula assume the woman was an aerobics instructor. Oh, yes, this made sense: the firm thighs, the hard buttocks, and the stamina a mid-life lover would be in awe of. He would worship her on his knees. The sexual positions they might explore would bring tears to his eyes.

Ursula was distressed by her accidental voyeurism, aggravated by the past year's situation with Glenn: his late-hour obligations at work and the paralegal Pamela who frequently phoned their house on weekends to ask for Glenn and his haste to carry the portable phone outside on the deck to talk to her. How many times had she read in Glenn's face the lie he was covering up? *But I called you at the office, Glenn, and all I got was your voice mail. Why didn't you answer if you were there?* And more to the point, *Was someone there with you?* After all, his office couch was large enough to accommodate two . . . .

But despite her distress, Ursula watched the couple kiss, drank in the sight that was so private, yet so blatant, for any tourist to walk by and witness in this public area.

To see them fueled Ursula's fear that no marriage could stand the test of temptation. No one in light of such desire could tell the truth.

Honey, I swear I was there, Glenn said when she asked him. *Are you sure you called at that time? I could have been down the hall in the restroom.*

For an hour, Glenn? How embarrassing for her to admit she'd tried to call him for that long.

Ursula grieved for the man's wife, probably at some office herself or at home planning a dinner party. Perhaps tonight in bed he would evade her caresses, but in his way allow himself to touch her to quiet her doubts or his guilty conscience.

Ursula had first met Pamela at a Christmas party at Glenn's firm and had watched their shared smiles and the way they gravitated toward

each other the entire evening. But more disturbingly she noticed how little clusters of women watched Glenn and Pamela talking beside the refreshment table and then looked at her to see her response. That night she wanted Glenn to prove his desire for her. She wasn't really interested in sex so soon after Olivia's birth and couldn't help but keep part of her attention turned to the nursery. Still, she caressed Glenn, kissed his face, until he said, *You don't have to try so hard, Ursula.* Her face burned with shame and she wondered who Glenn was really thinking of when he turned the lamplight out and submitted to her. Surely the svelte Pamela was more desirable than she.

Why, Ursula asked now, as she watched the scene in the car, didn't this man simply divorce his wife to free himself for his mistress?

But she knew people tended sometimes to hold fiercely onto stability, hearth and home, while craving connection with another, more adored, figure. In Glenn's case there was Olivia to consider, though Glenn seemed to have only a perfunctory interest in their daughter. Born when Ursula was forty and Glenn forty-two, Olivia was more Ursula's dream come true than Glenn's.

She thought about President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Though he died in his mistress's arms, he had tenaciously stayed married to Eleanor. Ursula's father, who lived during the Depression, held FDR up as a model of benevolence and honor.

Now she watched the kiss–long, tender, the man's head moving, his mouth pressing deeper, deeper.

Ursula left the rest stop with a troubled heart. She had witnessed a crime, a betrayal, a murder of a sort. Something profoundly intimate, and she felt unclean.

But then as time passed, she found herself, mostly at night, recalling the way the man held the young woman's face in his hands–as if her face were sacred to touch.

And she thought of how the man had left the red car as quickly as he entered it. After he shut the door, he stood alone and stared as the woman sped onto the exit lane and into the busy interstate traffic.

Would anyone ever watch her leave with such pain in his face? Ursula wondered.

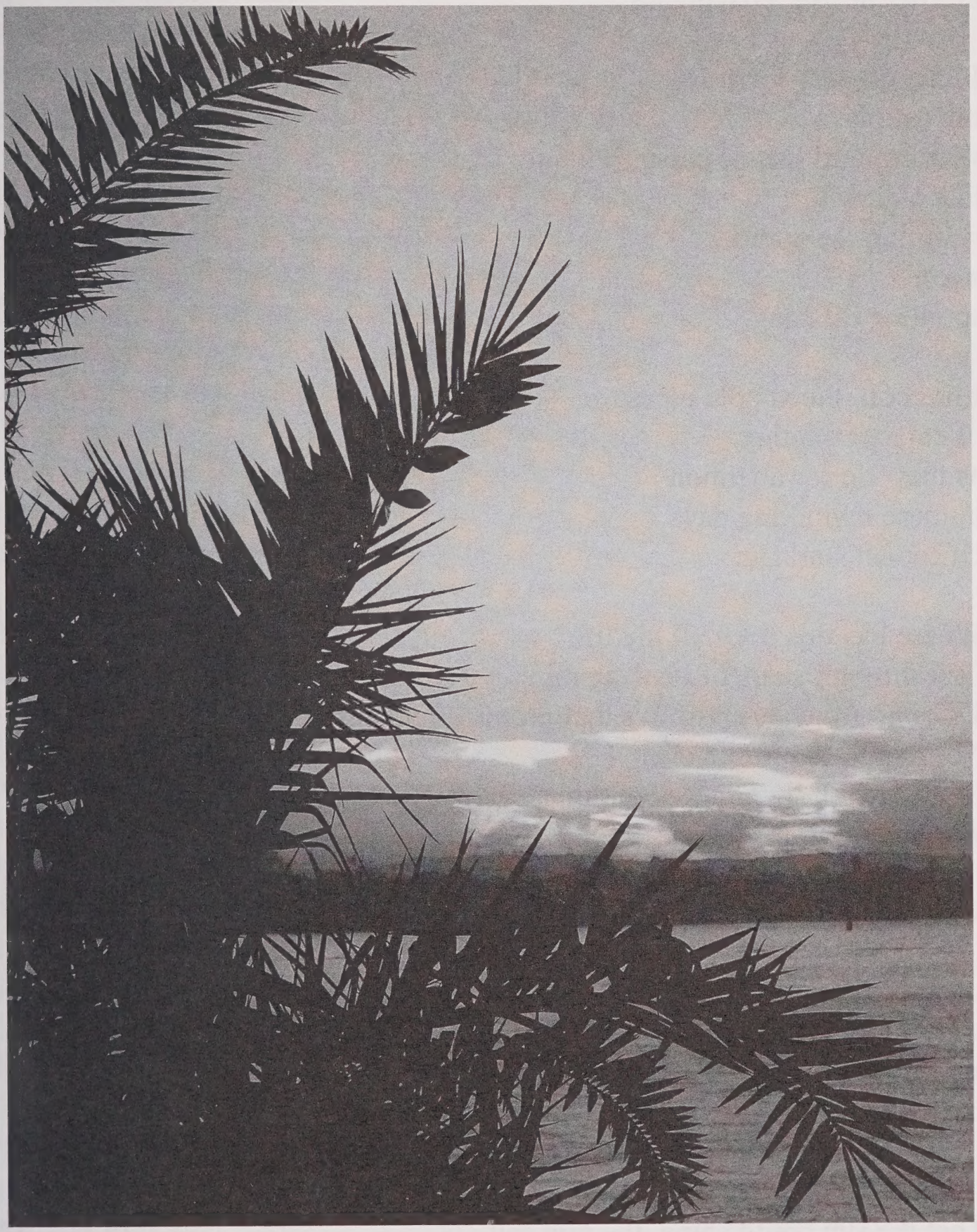
Only time would tell.

But in the meantime she lay in bed at night, Glenn turned away from her after another argument about Pamela. He had announced that

he and Pamela would be attending a legal conference together next month. *My God, Ursula, this is my job,* he said when she asked how he could do this to her.

In the darkness Ursula saw the man's face as the red car drove away. No words could explain the sadness in his eyes as if he thought he would never see his lover again.

Ursula thought about him until she fell asleep.



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Seattle to North Carolina by way of memory
(How I found my way home in the darkness)

Amy Goodman-Bide

The living room door is open
Wind, ten stories high,
billows in like a daydream.

In the drapery tornado,
the cat plays
with confetti bits of paper
like a clown
warming the audience
a jester
soothing the king.

I linger in the simple pleasure
of cat and weather
as they vie for attention
in these dwindling days
Of Indian summer.

Where has this been all my life?
I sat through years of pouring rain
Through Augusts and Julys that promised no sweat, no pain
Nothing to reminisce over
in the late chilly hours of autumn
when the skin prickles
from a day spent in the sun
and sleep arrives like a gift.

I waded through lightless winters
with my face hidden in the neck of a sweater
and my heart like a stone in my gut.

I would have come running before.
If I had known,
That the sun could shine, the rain fall

Thunder and lightening burst upon
the sky as it cradles
blue tinted mountains
like foster children.

I would have come running.
Before the gray temptations
Of Prozac-laden bridges
And sinister cups of black coffee
Held me captive in the eye of The Needle,
Spinning, endlessly spinning, into the cold earth.

Here, in the surrendering afternoon light,
The horizon stretches like a border
I am the sentinel, poised on the porch
Observing the land for signs of change.
Birds of prey dip low to the ground
They whisper that death is easy
Efficient
That it beckons to mice
Like water beckons to the roots
of spreading dogwoods
Like sunlight beckons to the petals of a rose
the wings of a velvet butterfly
the curling nose of a cloud.

I sit comfortably
And listen for the old woman
I will become
For the image I saw as a child
The apex of choices I've made.
I wait for her to catch up with me,
And free her hair
Into the sweet, humid air
I've come to call home
Where crickets tune to an owl's call
Where the night creeps in on silent feet
And fireflies lick
my last forgotten breath.

Wives' Tales

Gabrielle Thompson

A storyteller is a transmitter of history, morality, and sociocultural standards. The storyteller weaves information into a format that teaches and reinforces universal commonalties; he/she is a bridge between cultural reality and the audience. Through stories, we discover how remarkably alike we are. As an anthropologist who became a librarian, I am charmed by stories and have taken great interest in the folklore and superstitions of the cultures where I have traveled and lived. I spent fourteen years aboard our schooner, Satori, in the Virgin Islands. My daughter, Lyric, was born there and was molded by that culture until we moved to North Carolina when she was seven. She is now nineteen and pursuing a degree at Chapel Hill in Communications, with a minor in Social and Economic Justice. Her West Indian background influenced a passion regarding civil rights. She plans to spend a semester in Ghana next fall focusing on human rights and to visit South Africa on another honors study program this summer. Some of the most interesting folklore I encountered in the islands was during my pregnancy with Lyric. West Indians love babies and are delighted to tell you everything they think you should know about having them.

At the marketplace in Charlotte Amalie, as I reached for guavas and genips to add to my basket already overflowing with juicy orange paw-paws, limes, and sweet figs, the native shop woman sporting a massive ochre-and-blue striped turban eyed my belly as she whacked off the top of a drinking coconut with her machete. She pushed the hairy orb toward me asking, "Dat a baby you makin' in deh, or you jus gettin' fat?"

I'd learned in my years in St. Thomas not to take offense at personal comments or questions. It wasn't meant as prying. Elders were supposed to give advice–to everyone. Smiling, I answered, "A baby. My first."

Her eyes widened. In her culture, a woman my age–pressing thirty-five–would be more likely to be a grandmother than an incipient mother. She again offered the coconut. "Drink. Dat be a strong child when de mama drink de milk of de coconut."

I knew better than to argue and drank the effervescent juice. I thanked her and asked what I owed for it and my basket of fruit. She handed me a bay branch, green and spicy, and told me to keep it in hand when I was at the market. She nodded behind me, where a very pregnant teenager stood buying sweet potato pies. It was bad luck to be around other pregnant women without greenery in hand, she said. Obviously, I knew nothing about being pregnant! She warned me against looking at "de cripples," anyone with a deformity, or my baby would share their fate. To sit cross-legged or lift my hands over my head would cause the umbilical cord to wrap around the unborn child's neck, strangling it before birth. (I didn't tell her I exercised each morning, including toe touches, and the baby was just fine. I'd seen the way she wielded a machete!) And, I should not touch any living animal, or my baby would be "twisted." My cat, which loved to purr herself to sleep on my belly, would not appreciate that tidbit. I knew not to empty the cat box while I was pregnant to prevent the remote chance of airborne infection from trichinosis (hey, it wouldn't hurt my husband to do it for nine months), but I kept all mention of my feline friend to myself. I'd heard the superstition stateside that a cat would steal a baby's breath, and knew that West Indians would be sure to believe the same.

"Doan take no tub," she warned me, "only showah."

I assured her I would follow her directive, easy enough to do since I lived on a boat which had only a shower. I did not ask her about my daily swim in the sea for fear it would also be verboten. As I handed her the money I owed her, she shook her head and lamented, "You owe de debil a day's wook."

It took me a minute before realization dawned and I asked, "Because I'm left-handed?"

She nodded, black eyes wide and solemn, inches from my blue ones.

"I know," I said with a sigh. "When I was a little girl, my teachers tried to make me write with my right hand, but I just couldn't manage it."

She commiserated with me. "When de baby come, make it sleep on de right side. Den it not be wrong-handed. Deh beat my daddy when he be small and tie his hand behind his back, but he still be wrong-handed."

Before I left the market, she warned me not to wear high heels (I owned only sandals) or my child would be cross-eyed. I should keep an open pair of scissors under my mattress to predispose an easy birth. I

didn't follow that advice and did have an extremely difficult time. The loss of five pints of blood almost caused my death, but that was more a result of poor hospital care than the difficult birth process.

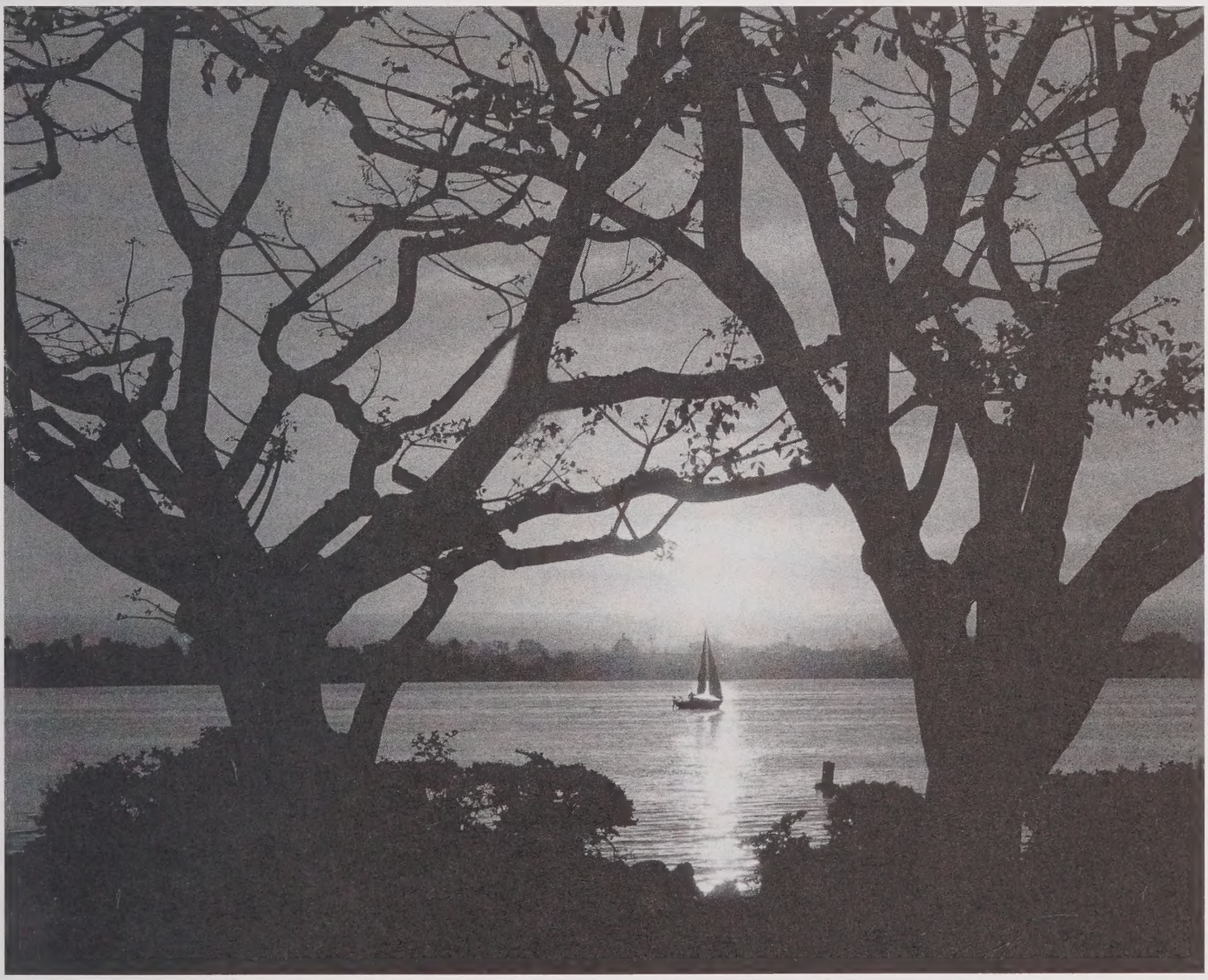
Being Irish, I comply with that culture's most basic superstition by carrying a four-leaf clover in my wallet for good luck. The foundation of that superstition lies with the first mother, Eve. Supposedly, the four-leaf clover is the only plant she carried on her departure from the Garden of Eden. And, according to folklore, the day she was banished with Adam was Friday the 13th, which was further jinxed when Jesus died on the same date. The negative impact of the number thirteen is manifested in another aspect of Christian lore. Thirteen at the dinner table causes one of the party to die before the year is out. Of course, the statistics were much worse for the thirteen at Jesus' final meal. In Leonardo da Vinci's painting of *The Last Supper*, notice that Judas has his hand up over his left shoulder as if he has thrown the salt that lies spilled on the table, another widely held superstition to thwart bad luck. Black cats earned a bad rap during the Inquisition as witches' familiars that could transport their mistresses' spirits to do evil deeds without detection. (I personally think the superior, aloof attitude the cat displays toward humans was to blame for the animosity that patriarchal society felt toward felines.) The fear of walking under a ladder also began in early Christian times, as it represented the breaking of the Trinity formed by the ladder leaning against the wall.

West Indians believe in ghosts, which are called jumbies. Necklaces of jumbie beads (red seeds with a black dot "eye") protect the wearer, and pennies on the eyes of the dead keep their spirits from leaking out. If you are crass enough to fall asleep on the night a loved one dies, that spirit will grab you by the big toe and pull your spirit out of your body, making you join the person in death. On Salt Island I asked Clementine why the graves had conch shell horns and rocks covering them. She replied, "Keeps de jumbies in. De conk call 'em in, de rock make 'em stay dere."

When we sailed to Salt Island with our newborn daughter, Clementine told me not to cut my baby's fingernails or she would grow up to be a thief. I was more terrified of cutting too close to the quick and let her nails grow until they began to scratch her face as she waved her delicate little hands around her head. (I wonder if that had anything to do with the thick, long, beautiful nails she has always been able to grow.)

Later in the day, I watched as Clementine cleaned a fish at her table near the salt pond. When she discovered pebbles in its stomach, she explained it portended a hurricane. The fish, she said, ate the rocks to sink deeper into the sea to be safe. She warned me to watch the moon that night–a ring around it would verify the storm. We happened to be headed to Hurricane Hole, the safest place to be in a storm. We didn't have bad weather that night, but we did have a tropical wave roll through a week later.

My favorite West Indian wives' tale is the phrase, "You got sand in your shoes, so you got to return." I spent so many years with sand in my shoes that the islands will always feel like home to me and I will always look forward to my return.



Photograph by Shirley McLaughlin

Notes on Contributors

Kenet Adamson teaches in the English and Developmental Studies Departments.

Joe Allawos teaches Biology in the Division of Arts and Sciences.

Annie Cicale teaches art in the Division of Continuing Education.

Donna Helen Crisp teaches Nursing in the Division of Allied Health & Public Service.

Richard J. De Luca teaches Spanish in the Humanities Department.

Nancy Dillingham is the author of two books of short stories and poetry *New Ground* (1998) and *The Ambiguity of Morning* (2001). Her newest collection of poems is entitled *First Light* (2003). She has worked as a free-lance editor and reviewer and has taught poetry in UNCA's Great Smokies Writing Program. She is an instructor in Adult Basic Skills.

Julia Nunnally Duncan teaches English at McDowell Technical Community College. Her first book, a short story collection ***Blue Ridge Shadows***, was published in 2002 by Iris Press. A second story collection, ***Headin' to Graceland***, is forthcoming from Iris Press.

Lauren Faulkenberry teaches Creative Writing in the Division of Continuing Education. She is an award-winning writer and illustrator whose children's book *What Do Animals Do on the Weekend?* was published by Novello Festival press in 2002.

Joe Franklin is dean of the Division of Business and Hospitality Education.

Shirley Lyon Garcia is Nursing Program Director, PNE, McDowell Technical Community College.

Kathy Godfrey teaches English and Communications in the Division of Arts and Sciences.

Amy Goodman-Bide is an English as a Second Language instructor in the Division of Continuing Education.

Randee Goodstadt is Chair of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Department.

David Holcombe teaches English and Communications in the Division of Arts and Sciences.

Will Hooper teaches physics in the Division of Arts and Sciences.

Shirley McLaughlin is Director of the Learning Resources Center.

Celia Miles is the founding editor of *Victoria Press*. She is retired from the English and Communications Department. She is the author of *A Thyme for Love*, a romance novel, *Mattie's Girl: An Appalachian Childhood*, and *On a Slant, A Collection of Stories*.

Carolyn Pidgeon is an instructor in the Compensatory Education program in the Division of Continuing Education.

Ron Rash holds the John Parris Distinguished Chair in Appalachian Studies at Western Carolina University. His first novel, *One Foot in Eden*, won the Appalachian Writers Association Book of the Year award. His second novel, *Saints at the River*, will be published by Henry Holt in August 2004.

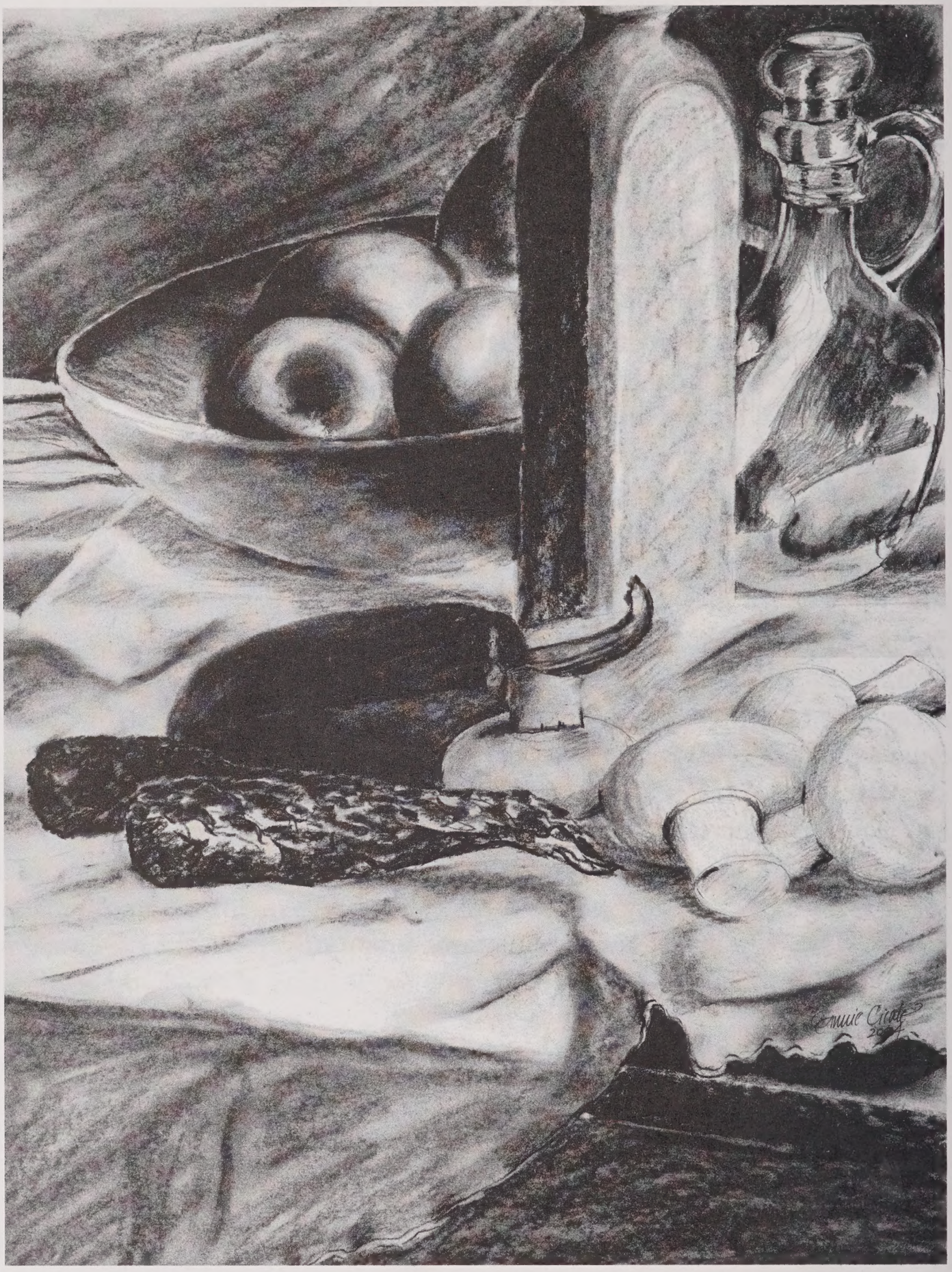
Lee Sokol is a secretary in the Division of Business and Hospitality Education.

Gabrielle M. Thompson is Coordinator of Library Services at McDowell Technical Community College.

Chris Tibbetts teaches English and Communications in the Division of Arts and Sciences.

Derick Tickle is an instructor in the Decorative Restoration program in the Division of Continuing Education.

***Victoria Press* continues to include contributions from neighboring community colleges. We thank each contributor, especially Ron Rash.**



Drawing by Annie Cicale